A STUDY OF INDIAN NOVELISTS WRITING IN ENGLISH FROM 1930 TO THE PRESENT

by

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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University, and to the best of my knowledge and belief contains no copy or paraphrase of material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

A. C. Harnett.

"...I think we have an advantage over all other countries in the world where life is so standardised that they're hard up for material. We have abundance of it here."

——R.K. NARAYAN

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SUMMARY

The main aims of the thesis are: (1) To provide a comprehensive survey of the growth, development and achievements of modern Indian fiction in English; (2) to view this literature in critical perspective; (3) to examine thoroughly and interpret critically the work of the most prominent novelists—namely Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao.

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I BACKGROUNDS

1 INTRODUCTORY

At the present time an upsurge of interest in Commonwealth Literature is occurring. This interest is evident in academic, newspaper and lending-library circles, and combines a taste for random general viewing with a growing specialisation of critical attention. The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, founded in 1965, is an example of the latter development. Commonwealth writing, however, is much more culturally comprehensive than the anachronistic epithet suggests, and as a descriptive term is meant to refer to world literatures in English outside the United Kingdom and the U.S.A. These literatures, particularly the African and West Indian, tend to be in fashion nowadays, and are deservingly in need of responsible criticism from the west as well as locally.

By 'responsible' in this context is meant, for instance, the preservation of integrity of standards whenever one of the new literatures in English is evaluated in terms of either the English literary

tradition, or twentieth-century literary achievements in England or America. The critical responsibility not to confuse detached comment and enthusiastic reader-involvement is also most relevant. It is necessary to remember that western readers are likely to respond sympathetically to Indian or African novels in English, for example, because of non-literary as well as artistic considerations. The critic of the Indian novel often has to distinguish artistic from artless sociology. The enthusiasm attaching to first discoveries may not include a disciplined value judgement about the discovered works, or may result in immature or prejudiced evaluations.

The dangers of critical immaturity or prejudice are of course very real whenever a critic from one environment and cultural tradition attempts sensitively to interpret the art of a foreign and very different society with which he has little first-hand contact. In such cases, of course, art is a very tangible bridge. However, one of the background realities of contemporary criticism of Commonwealth literature is that much of this criticism is based on the kind of engagement which takes place on cultural bridges. This applies especially to the present study, which looks at the Indian novel in English from the early 1930s to the present. Thus the encounter of east and west, which is a theme prominent

in Indian writing in English, provides a solid background to most criticism of this writing.

So far as the present study is concerned, the critical position adopted is essentially humanist, interpretative and empathetic, and is based on the awareness that some appreciation of Indian cultural and social backgrounds is necessary to an understanding of Indian novels, and that a non-Indian critic's knowledge of these backgrounds is not only restricted but is also impaired by occidental fallibilities. On the other hand, a novel is the product in words of an individual sensibility and, despite some current ephemeral tendencies by writers to deny the importance and subtlety of language, readers of literature still respond primarily to words and their arrangement. Indian novelists who write in English are therefore simultaneously accessible to English-speakers of the west as well as of India. However, any Indian novelist who writes only for a western audience, consciously or unconsciously, is unlikely to produce work of quality.

The scope of the present study has been determined by a number of factors. Firstly, it is comprehensive in terms of the number of authors included and the period spanned by them. This period from 1930 to the present marks virtually the emergence of the Indian

novel in English, and the three best-known and most established figures—Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao—were born in the first decade of this century, published their first novels in the mid-thirties, and are still writing to-day. Prior to 1930 Indian novels in English were few and far between, while literary merit was not much in evidence.

A second criterion to have been applied is that novels translated into English from Indian languages are outside the scope of the present study, apart from a few isolated references and comments. Thirdly, the authors discussed are all Indian-born. For this reason Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, a European married to a Parsi and living in Delhi, has not received the attention her fiction otherwise merits. She has generally been regarded as an Indian novelist, even though she thinks of herself as something of a literary outsider. Recently she remarked that she wrote her early novels and stories 'about an alien country and an alien people' 'in an effort to understand this place I'd come to live in'. She adds:

> I also realised that it was an effort in which I had largely failed. I now began to be interested in something that was more closely personal to me—not in India itself but in its effect on Europeans.[1]

1 In a letter to Margaret Dyer dated 21st August [1968].

In other words Ruth Prawer Jhabvala sees herself as belonging, not to Indian literature, but to what used to be called 'Anglo-Indian' literature.

A further factor influencing the scope of the present work is the critical necessity of matching comprehensiveness with a more intensive approach where the work of such novelists as Anand, Narayan and Raja Rao warrants looking at in depth. Indeed, it is surprising that as yet no book-length study of R.K. Narayan has been published.

The small volume of serious, specific and well-informed commentaries on Indian fiction in English that have so far appeared justifies the kind of critical compromise between comprehensiveness and concentration, between the individual work and its Indian contexts, which has been attempted in the following chapters. To date the only relevant studies in book form are Dorothy M. Spencer's 'Annotated Bibliography' Indian Fiction in English (1960), K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar's Indian Writing in English (1962), and M.E. Derrett's The Modern Indian Novel in English (1966). Each of these works is useful and commendable in a pioneering kind of way, but rather than eliminating the possibility of searching criticism they indicate the need for it. Dorothy Spencer's introduction to her Bibliography shows that her approach to Indian

fiction—her primary raison d'être—is sociological rather than literary, and reflects the tendency in some universities to study literature as an aid to sociology. Iyengar intended his study to be a monumental introduction to the whole of Indian writing in English—poetry, prose, fiction and drama—from its beginnings in the late eighteenth century up to the early 1960s. In consequence Indian Writing in English combines literary history with a descriptive method of criticism, and the chapters on modern Indian novelists inevitably offer a general coverage rather than precise interpretations.

The descriptive approach to literature also underlies The Modern Indian Novel in English, in which Derrett treats a large number of novels as source material for an elaborate and dextrous documentation of comparative points of interest regarding social attitudes, characterisation, forms, themes, style, the presentation of nature and inter-racial relations. This implies that an individual work of literature, or a genre, or a literary period is arbitrarily composed of a set of abstract literary categories. The Modern Indian Novel in English is, as its author says in the Introduction, 'a study with a particular slant'; 'It combines literary, historical and sociological elements'.[2] But Derrett's study, sub-titled

2 Université Libre de Bruxelles, Editions de L'Institut de Sociologie, 1966, p.7.

A Comparative Approach, is more directed towards literary classification with anthologised examples rather than generating responsive criticism. The 'Approach' smacks of the social scientist, and of the view that literature is a means to a scholarly end rather than an end in itself. It is no accident, therefore, that Dorrett fails to discuss and evaluate the work of even one novelist from the individual point of view, and fails to offer a sustained appreciation of even one novel.

The best published criticism of Indian fiction in English is confined to a few articles. Given this critical background, then, together with the fact that R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao are superior to many contemporary novelists who are better-known and widely admired, the present study is offered in the attempt to satisfy in some measure a genuine need for critical discussion. The following discussion will show that Indian fiction in English has tended to branch in two main directions: one, novels which were written primarily in response to recent Indian history, particularly the social and political changes and events associated with the struggle for Independence; the other, novels which are much more oriented to the Indian cultural tradition, and in which the authors do not profess revolutionary

allegiances or offer naked criticisms of society. The first direction was pioneered by Mulk Raj Anand and broadened later by such writers as Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Manohar Malgonkar, Kamala Markandaya, Balachandra Rajan and Khushwant Singh. The second direction is represented in the main by R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Sudhin Ghose, all of whom manifest unified sensibilities in the sense that they have avoided the split between tradition and modernity which is evident among the social protest writers whose work is often flawed because it is didactic or because the deep perennial contact with life is missing.

Before examining individual authors and works, however, it is necessary to outline the various contexts—the Indian literary background, the language question, the Indian environment, the religious tradition, and so on—which are relevant to an understanding of the Indian novel.

2 TRADITION AND INDIVIDUAL TALENTS

The growth of the various modern Indian literatures owes something to the cultural ferment which occurred at the turn of the nineteenth century and which assumed the proportions of a minor renaissance. The vernacular languages, particularly Bengali, emerged as artistic and intellectual mediums of expression, while creative writing in the English language had already been given a promising start by Rammohan Roy (1774-1833), Henry Derozio (1909-31), Kashiprosad Ghose (1809-73), and Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1827-73).

The notion of a resurgent modern India gained historical strength from the past renaissance patterns of the Aryan-Vedic and Mogul-Islamic cultures. Its revolutionary character lay in the proposals to re-orient the Hindu tradition, and its special feature was its Western-derived modernity. If the Italianate Renaissance of the fifteenth century was an example of the ancient past leading the present, then the Indian Renaissance of 1870-1910 was an example of the present

leading the ancient past, for European civilization brought to the indigenous tradition a modern direction and new ethical and aesthetic focuses. Intellectual life was invigorated by philosophical concepts of individuality and freedom, and pragmatic and scientific rationalism expanded the possibilities of concrete action in a world of 'illusion'. Writers familiar with Europe largely through English literature adopted from the west the novel form and such conventions as Romantic attitude and Victorian taste.

India, of course, possessed in Sanscrit a classical literary heritage of epic, drama and an encyclopaedic range of devotional verse. This literature is 'literary' in the sense that it is imaginative, employs descriptive and imagistic techniques and fictional devices, and portrays character dramatically. But, with the exception of Kalidasa, it is primarily a moral or religious literature, valued for its revelatory and moral qualities rather than as art. A distinction between secular and religious interests was inconceivable, for religion and literature were thought of as two expressions of a single spiritual impulse. Dependent on hyperbole and the supernatural, art served at the altar of religious truth and in so doing evolved such forms as epic, fable, chronicle, parable, moral tale, short story and picaresque romance.

Mulk Raj Anand observes that:

> Although India is perhaps one of the two early homes of fictional narrative, the novel as it has come to be understood today, is a comparatively recent development in our country.[3]

When the living vernacular languages sought a realistic form of literary expression, the western novel—made available largely as a result of the British impact—was preferred to the forms available in a fabulous moral tradition, though aspects of this tradition were inevitably assimilated into the Indian novel. There have been attempts in poetry in English to adapt the medium to Hindu philosophy; Sri Aurobindo's 24,000 line blank-verse epic, Savitri, is an example. However, contemporary poetry in the main aims at a concept of poetry which is a concrete imitation of life, rather than a mysticism of abstractions, as P. Lal's Workshop group endeavours to show.

The comparatively late growth of the novel in India has been put down to the inhibiting effects of the Hindu emphasis on cosmic experience, other-worldliness, the ethical importance of passivity, and the moral negativism of the natural world. Though a yearning for the ineffable is conducive to poetry, it is not of much structural use to the novel which is

3 "The Emergence of the Hero in the Modern Indian Novel", The Illustrated Weekly of India, Dec.9 1956, p.42.

basically a realistic form. A.L. Kroeber remarks:

> In India...the novel may have been inhibited partly by the epic. But a larger factor is likely to have been the Hindu penchant for extravagant exaggeration...[4]

Dorothy Spencer adds to these hypothetical causes 'a lack of interest in the events of ordinary life as lived by man on this earth, combined with a lack of interest in the observable differences in the personal characters of particular individuals',[5] and suggests that the appearance of the Indian novel would have necessitated 'some considerable degree of reorientation in the Indian world view'.[6]

Such reorientation in fact accompanied the birth of the Indian novel, for in the latter half of the nineteenth century the Indian world view was being gradually qualified by a developing humanistic consciousness and social criticism. In this regard, the renaissance Hindu enlightenment was the cultural centre of reorientation.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, progenitor of the Bengali novel, placed the 'Indian world view' within novelistic contexts, particularly in the 'history'

4 "The Novel in Asia and Europe" in The Nature of Culture, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1952, p.413.
5 Indian Fiction in English, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960, p.9
6 ibid., p.10.

and 'romance' modes. His first novel, Rajmohan's Wife (1864) was written in English. Formally, the novel is artificial; as a confrontation with real life it is a crude work. Rajmohan's Wife is a pastiche of the hackneyed literature of trial and injustice which was popular in England and America at the time. Against a nocturnal rural background Chatterjee presents such themes as the trial of modest womanhood and the tribulations of connubial love. He relies on many of the conventions of the popular novel: melodrama, romance, authorial intimacy with the 'dear reader', and a plot which relies on intrigue, evil machinations, violence, sinister duplicities, illicit captivity, filial maleficence, a false inheritance and the attempt to purloin a will. But, while evil is eventually punished, significantly the reward of virtue is resignation not happiness. Yet, despite its artistic crudity, Rajmohan's Wife at least demonstrated that Indian English-language fiction could be written and was a legitimate branch of Indian literature. Chatterjee's concept of the novel's function is similar to that espoused in the Preface to the first American novel, The Power of Sympathy (1789), which according to its author was written to expose the hazardous consequences of seduction, to stress the need for female education, and to demonstrate the necessity for moral economy in the affairs of

life.

The social and moral aims of literature envisaged by Chatterjee were widened and given much more sophisticated expression by Rabindranath Tagore and his literary colleagues. Although Tagore's novels make the point that the Hindu orthodoxy needed to be liberalised, they are conceived according to artistic rather than didactic criteria. Mulk Raj Anand justly claims that the 'hero' 'in a three dimensional form emerges in the Indian novel with Tagore'.[7] Following the intellectual enlightenment of Tagore, Prem Chand's realistic Hindi novels of peasant life (notably Godan) mark a new stage in the development of the Indian novel. Anand interprets this transition, along Marxist lines, as signifying a proletarian succession to the bourgeois novel. As I.G.P. Singh points out, Prem Chand believed that modern Indian literature 'should reflect change, an attitude of action, and a bias towards social good'.[8] So far as Indian fiction in English is concerned, Anand, D.F. Karaka, Kamala Markandaya, Khushwant Singh, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Humayun Kabir and others were undoubtedly conscious of Prem Chand's achievement when they wrote their novels about the peasantry and village life. When account is taken, not only of the extent to which the nationalist impulse was translated into literary terms, but also

7 "The Emergence of the Hero in the Modern Indian Novel", p.42.

8 "New Writers and Leaders in India", Great Britain and the East, XLVII Dec.17 1936, p.895.

of the strong didactic tradition—shifting emphasis from the religious to the social and political—that has influenced the growth of the novel, it is not surprising that much Indian fiction in English is sociologically orientated.

Most generalisations concerning the emergence of the novel in India are in line with the following statement by Ernest Bender:

> The developments in the new prose literatures reflect the dynamic changes and attitudes—social, political, intellectual and material—wrought in the Indian social structure by the contact with the West. Religious and esoteric themes yielded place to secular and popular subjects. The exploits of gods and mythic heroes, over-exhausted motifs, recurring through the literatures with little variation, were shunned for themes dealing with mundane affairs and creatures.[9]

However, it would be wrong to ignore or oversimplify the psychological and social tensions involved in the uneasy conjunction of the old ways with new evolving values. Indeed these tensions comprise one of the main themes of Indian fiction. Moreover, the religious and mythical traditions have by no means suffered a literary rejection, as the novels of R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Sudhin Ghose amply demonstrate.

9 "The Treatment of Contemporary Literature in an Undergraduate Course on Indian Civilization", in Introducing India in Liberal Education (edited by Milton Singer), Chicago, The University of Chicago, 1957, p.142.

There is a general agreement among novelists and critics that the European-derived novel form should be an organic expression of Indian sensibility, not an imitation of an alien consciousness, that the Indian novel written in English should reflect truly the mind and spirit of India, and that it should avoid slanting views of India in order to engage the outsider's interest. There is also in India a general critical awareness of the indigenous problems involved in establishing the novel. Thus Hamdi Bey suggests that the impact of French realism created for the Indian novelist an ethical dilemma:

> It was an embarrassing situation for the Indian novelist; he belonged through links of craftsmanship and literary ideals to modern realism whereas the life he had to be real about was largely medieval. His own ethics were only partly modern, polished on the surface by western education but largely and inwardly medieval too.[10]

However, it could also be claimed that the modern Indian writer's experience of belonging simultaneously to a 'medieval' and a twentieth-century world enabled him to develop a muscular and flexible historical sense. Many contemporary Indian writers possess instinctively that 'historical sense' which, according to T.S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent", is the basis of tradition:

10 "Dilemma of the Indian novelist can he create a free character?", Quest, Vol. I No. 4 Feb.-March 1956, p.13.

...the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that...the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is...what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.[11]

The limited experience of the tradition of the novel in India has been fruitfully compensated for, in a number of cases, by the novelist's indigneous historical sense. In this regard Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan can be approved of, on Eliot's terms, as traditional writers.

In The Serpent and the Rope (1960) Raja Rao's characterisation of the Brahmin Rama (the narrator and main character) emphasises that Rama's sensibility is traditional and combines 'a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal'. Rama is much preoccupied by the age of his soul. Of his ancestors, ancient and modern, he says, 'I can feel them in me, and know they know they did not die'.[12] He experiences the Sanscrit literary heritage as 'a simultaneous existence':

In the recesses of our being there are great tracts of the unknown, pastures of the invisible...

11 Selected Prose, Penguin Books, 1953, p.23.
12 The Serpent and the Rope, John Murray, 1960, p.7.

civilization is nothing but the familiarity with which we go into this inner property, cultivated and manured from age to age....The gods that reside in us are of an ancient making...The Brahmin, the Brahmin, I said to myself—and to convince myself of familiarity with myself I chanted Sri Sankara again.

Mano budhi Ahankara Chittani Naham...

Not Mind, nor Insight, Mineness nor Substance... I was almost in tears. (pp.92-3)

India to Rama is the India of his 'inner being':

The India of Brahma and Prajapathi; of Varuna, Mithra and Aryaman; of Indra, of Krishna, Shiva, and Parvathi; of Rama, Harishchandra, and Yagnyavalkya; this India was a continuity I felt...(p.248)

Here is Rama experiencing the timeless and the temporal 'together':

I could see in myself a vastness, as it were a change of psychic dimension, an awareness of a more ancient me....There was just a re-discovery, as though having lost a brother in famine or on pilgrimage I had wandered hundreds of miles...from Kings, and going beyond, by the Ganges or the Cauvery, from Saints and Sages I had asked, backwards in history to the times of the Upanishads, even unto Yagnyavalkya and Maitreyi; and as though at each epoch, with each person, I had left a knowledge of myself, a remembered affirmation of myself; and in this affirmation had been the awareness of the Presence that I am, that I am my brother. Thus it was as I walked about in my Kensington room, feeling the cold of London, the dampness of the river...(p.197)

In this passage the incantatory, nostalgic, time-weary

rhythm successfully suggests the style of a bygone sensibility as well as of contemporaneity.

The Serpent and the Rope concludes with Rama's historical sense developed to the fine mystical point where he knows the name of his guru, knows the way to Truth. He can assert to himself: 'Ever since being has known itself as being I have Known it' (p.408).

R.K. Narayan's historical sense is never as introspectively and self-consciously evident as is Raja Rao's, though it is equally authentic and Indian. Here is an example of the way this 'sense' permeates the personality of Srinivas in The Printer of Malgudi (first published as Mr. Sampath in 1949):

> Srinivas suddenly said to himself: "I might be in the twentieth century B.C. for all it matters, or 4000 B.C."... His scenario-writing habit suddenly asserted itself. His little home, the hall and all the folk there, Anderson Lane and, in fact, Malgudi itself dimmed and dissolved...Presently appeared...Sri Rama, the hero of Ramayana.[13]

On another occasion, Srinivas experiences the following revelation while watching a demented young man having his evil spirits 'exorcised' according to customary practice:

> Dynasties rose and fell. Palaces and mansions appeared and disappeared. The entire country went down under the fire and sword of the invader, and was washed clean when Sarayu overflowed its bounds. But it always

13 The Printer of Malgudi, Michigan State University Press, 1957, p.258. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

had its rebirth and growth. And throughout the centuries, Srinivas felt, this group was always there: Ravi with his madness, his well-wishers with their panaceas and their apparatus of cure. (p.260)

Sudhin Ghose is yet another individual talent whose novels are permeated by an historical sense and traditional sensibility, both of which are expressed most characteristically in picaresque fantasy and mythopoeic vision. His The Vermilion Boat (1953) ends with an apotheosis in which mythic event and human experience are indistinguishable. On the level of human reality, the narrator attains manhood, survives the storms of life and wins his girl; on the simultaneous level of myth, the sea voyage in the Vermilion Boat signifies the visionary quest for ultimate reality, the narrator is saved in the squall and returned to land by the legendary dolphin, and he is reunited with his spiritual, divine beloved. The narrator is vouchsafed a vision 'inconceivable to the imagination of man': 'all my consciousness was concentrated in simply seeing'; 'a cataract of fulgurant flame poured on the sea'.[14] Then later, straddled on the back of the porpoise, he

...was transformed into a sea-god—one who defied the elements and to whom the wind and the waves paid homage. They no longer raved about death, but spoke of abundant life. (p.301)

14 The Vermilion Boat, Michael Joseph, 1953, p.296.

Even the work of a novelist like Mulk Raj Anand, whose historical sense is polemically Marxist and whose attitude to tradition is ambivalent, at times reflects a susceptibility to metaphysical enchantment which is at odds to his social criticism and purpose. The traditional side of Anand's sensibility is more evident in Seven Summers (1951) than elsewhere in his fiction, largely because the content of this book is determined by the author's intention to recapture his early childhood. Anand shows how the young boy's notions of reality were affected by, among other things, the road that passed his home and the legendary stories heard on his mother's knee. Thus the boy sees simultaneously both the everyday traffic on the road as well as mythological and historical India—nature deities, avatars, saints, gurus, the Mughal and British empires.

While Raja Rao in particular has shown that the novel, in Indian hands, can be an appropriate medium for the presentation of metaphysical subjects and themes, there has been a tendency among some Indian writers to regard the novel as merely or solely an essayistic means to a philosophical or religious end. Such a breach between form and content is evident, for example, in Dilip Kumar Roy's The Upward Spiral (1949), in which the author's sense of history and tradition is more attuned to non-fictional prose than the novel. The Upward Spiral is the product of the author's

spiritual vocation and his experiences in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry, and is a collection of philosophical dialogues instead of a story in the usual sense. The following comment from Roy's Preface to his book indicates an intention which, in this case, was to prove incompatible with the novel form:

> I wanted first to call this a mystic novel...the things we call concrete and tangible appear so in proportion as they mirror the mystic Light beyond land and sea that informs them.[15]

Poetry has always been a more suitable vehicle for the expression of mystical feeling than the novel.

If the Indian novel as a literary form is to have a tradition of its own, instead of relying altogether on the borrowed one, then it is the Indian novelist's general consciousness of his indigenous cultural background which is likely to provide the shaping foundation for the development of the novel in his country. The writer's historical sense, as defined by Eliot, is therefore bound to be an important factor contributing to such a development, and it can be shown that Narayan and Raja Rao especially have proved this to be so. Some commentators, however, point to a

15 The Upward Spiral, Bombay, Jaico Publishing House, 1949.

debilitating absence of a sense of history in Indian life and literature. Nirad C. Chaudhuri in The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian (1951) claims that the average Indian, dominated by his reflexes, has no consciousness of duration and consequently exists in paralysing bondage to the past without understanding it. V.S. Naipaul in An Area of Darkness (1964) attributes the lack of historical vision to the Indian 'negation' which, he claims, is a protection against the angry admission of pain and decay. Possibly these alleged conditions help to explain the paradox that Rama in The Serpent and The Rope is an historian acutely conscious of the continuity of human life but claims that India has no history because the reality of its existence lies outside time.

Nevertheless, even if it is true, as is asserted by Rob in White, that the writer could not 'count on the guidance of India's literary heritage in coping with the national scene',[16] the novelist writing in English could count both on what he knew of the art of the novel in England and on the sources of imaginative nourishment in the Indian way of life. And if a novelist coping with the national scene reduced literature to propaganda, the reason was more likely to reside in himself rather than in his stars.

16 "Fiction in India", The Reporter, Vol.28 No. 4 Feb 14 1963, p.54.

3 LANGUAGE

The problem of establishing a tradition of Indian writing in English is complicated by the language controversy. Although the non-Indian critic of this literature simply accepts that it is writing in English and attempts to view this writing in the light of the same critical standards he applies to contemporary English, American or Australian literature, he still needs to appreciate the nature of the Indian controversy over the creative use of English. Further, he can no more escape the question of how successful Indian English is than he can ignore the need for some special Indian criteria in appreciating the local aspects of sensibility which are to be found in the Indian novel in English.

If the first astonishing fact about Indian writing in English is its sheer bulk, then the second must be its increasing volume as late as twenty years after Independence and after the fervent prognostications of its death. Eleanor Hough's observation in 1951 that 'the volume of writing in English shows no abatement' is even more applicable to-day, and may suggest to some

that a tradition has now been established. The survival of English as part of the national heritage is not unexpected in view of India's capacity for assimilation and veneration. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar asserts:

> We cannot list Rammohan Roy and Ranade, Vivekananda and Aurobindo, Tilak and Gokhale, Tagore and Gandhi in the calendar of our prophets and poets, and yet cultivate a blind antipathy towards the language they used as the forceful means of communicating their meaning and message to India and the world.[17]

An important factor contributing to the survival of English, of course, is that it is still the only language common to all regions of India. Earlier hopes that Hindi would be a suitable official language for India have been frustrated to a significant extent, and there is still a strong antipathy to Hindi in the south.[18]

17 Indian Writing in English, Asia Publishing House, 1962, p.15.

18 K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar (Indian Writing in English, p.12) produces statistics to show that 'Hindi has made no spectacular advance': (1) In 1957 the 50 English newspapers ('better edited' and 'read all over the country') had a circulation of 1,005,000 compared with the 349,000 circulation of the 57 Hindi newspapers; (2) 'there are seven times as many quarterly journals in English (mostly of a learned character) as in Hindi—and as many in English as in almost all the other languages put together'; (3) by about 1958 11 universities had published 1,045 books of which 778 were in English and 26 in Hindi. David McCutchion ("Indian writing in English", Quadrant, Vol.VI No.4 1962, p.46) confirms this trend: 'During the year 1961-2, more than three times as many books were published in English (9361) as in Hindi (2805)'.

The historicity, status and practicability of English provides its advocates with good arguments for regarding English as both an Indian language and an Indian creative medium. They stress the benefits of English as a unifying force in the intellectual, political, and commercial spheres, as well as in higher education, all-India administration, inter-state communication and international relationships. English, they say, proved its efficacy as a weapon of leadership and a means of fostering political enlightenment and furthering the freedom struggle. They also believe it has a valuable role in promoting appreciation of the Indian situation in the world at large. The pro-English advocates therefore maintain that the transference of the 'Quit India' attitude to the English language is chauvenistic and stupid.

Such arguments also bolster the view that Indian writing in English has an accredited place in Indian literature, and that this is not to the detriment of the vernacular languages because any widening of literary range is culturally beneficial. Even so, it is a fact that India's linguistic fragmentation has enabled English not merely to hold its own, but also to become India's leading ambassadorial literary language.

Indian writers have argued the legitimacy of English for the following reasons: its internationality enables them to participate in the trend towards cosmopolitanism in literature; it is advantageous to work

within a sophisticated and richly developed literature; the first-hand experience of writing creatively in English enables the writer genuinely to introduce western techniques into Indian literature and to bring back a respect for characterisation; the novel's tradition and techniques are still being acquired from mainly English models; the literary consciousness of those writing in English is, as a result of their education, as much English as vernacular; the introduction into English of Indian idioms is adding to its creative range; English is believed to give the Indian a sense of intellectual release and freedom; English is part of the Indian background and enables the Indian writer to transcend linguistic regionalism and to communicate throughout India; and finally it is claimed by Indians writing in English that they cannot write as well in any other language. Case-histories confirm the sincerity of the above convictions.

The poet Dom Moraes, who has acquired a reputation both in England and India, comes from an entirely English-speaking family. In the introduction to Gone Away, Moraes writes:

> The background of my life had been English. In the streets of India I felt uneasy, knowing neither the language, nor, because of not having come into contact with many Indians who were not from an English background, the people.[19]

19 Gone Away An Indian Journey, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1960. p.9.

As a poet, Dom Moraes is strictly cosmopolitan.

Mulk Raj Anand is another cosmopolitan, mainly of the ideological kind, who has eaten the fruits of temporary expatriatism. Dom Moraes comments approvingly: 'He was the first Indian writer in English to live in England; he had been a London literary figure in the thirties, and a friend of Forster and the Woolfs'.[20] Nirad C. Chaudhuri, probably India's finest living writer of English prose, is more dubious than most about the future of Indian writing in English but possesses the virtue of having exacting literary standards. Asked if he thought there was a future for English writing in India, Chaudhuri replied:

"Not if it is addressed to Indians. None at all. But what I do strongly feel is this, that some Indians will continue to write in English for the English-speaking world, and as time passes Indians will write English better, but not for Indians. There'll be fewer writers of English in India, but probably if they can get things published at all their literary standards will be of the highest Western type."[21]

R.K. Narayan is more optimistic:

"...we should just become dumb as far as communication with each other goes, but for English....In addition to being so utilitarian within the country itself...English gives you a window on the world....I think it is a very wonderful medium, which has come our way and we should keep it....Technological development and political ideas and everything that makes modern life, have come to us

20 ibid. p.19.
21 John Thompson, "Indian Accent", transcript of a feature on Indian writers broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Commission in late 1961, p.12.

only through the English language, however much we might try to shut our eyes to it. What's the use of throwing it into the background and trying to evolve a new set of technical terms and political...concepts?... personally I feel we are not really trying to get rid of English. It is only a sort of sentiment. You know, we tried to fight the British and send them out of the country, but...it is not their language, it is everybody's language in the world today. So English will continue.[22]

Ruthen Prawer Jhabvala comments: "What is a good thing I think is that there are more people writing...I don't think the standard of English has gone down".[23] Kamala Markandaya believes that, 'With regard to writing in English...work of high quality and integrity is now being produced'. 'Indian writing', she says, 'has shed its curlicues and is both limpid and readable'.[24]

Manohar Malgonkar, all of whose novels have been published in the Sixties, has expressed the view that 'whether we speak the English language well or badly, we have come to feel much more at home in it than in our own tongues—otherwise we would not be doing our writing in it'. He added, 'If we experience an odd twinge of conscience for preferring English to our own languages, it is perhaps only to be expected in the climate of hypersensitive nationalism that pervades a newly independent country'. These comments were made in an

22 ibid., pp.6-7.
23 ibid., pp.8,9.
24 in a letter to me dated 16th October, 1964.

article entitled "Purdah and Caste-Marks",[25] in which Malgonkar examines the phenomenon of the Indian English-language novelist and discusses his own literary education. He is well aware of the difficulties involved in acquiring a language through a system of formal training, and adds that many English-speaking Indians derive their ideas of English speech from American films, a deteriorating Anglo-Indian jargon, and the left-over talk of the British army and Boxwallahs. Their English, he says, is idiomatically anachronistic and orientally flavoured.

With these reservations in mind, however, Malgonkar goes on to say that the 'late exposure to the core of English literature' is advantageous in that 'we come upon the works of the major writers when our minds are already stretched'. 'You will find', Malgonkar claims 'that the average Indian writer who is any good at his work is an avid reader of English books, perhaps much more so than his counterpart in other countries'. Malgonkar's list of his 'influences' is an agglomeration which ranges from unliterary best-sellers to Milton and Shakespeare. His 'favourites' tended to be those who described the 'already familiar': Meadows Taylor, Maugham, Kipling, Conrad and Forster. He places Kipling and Forster in an 'exclusive sub-caste' of writers:

25 The Times Literary Supplement, June 4 1964, p.491.

...no one has transformed the full, stinging flavour of the Indian peasant's language into English as Kipling has, and no other author has shown such a deep (almost embarrassingly deep) understanding of the character of the educated Indian as E.M. Forster has.

"Purdah and Caste-Marks" is interesting, then, because it indicates the kinds of involvement Indian novelists have with English literature. Further, Malgonkar's notion of what constitutes a good novel is indicative of the influence nineteenth-century concepts of fiction have had on the Indian novel:

The only tangible influence I am aware of is that these [English] authors have helped me to formulate my idea of what constitutes a good novel. The one factor that I find common in all these writers...is that they are excellent story-tellers. Their novels are well-constructed, are dramatic, and they are not afraid of incident; above all, they entertain.

Malgonkar's own novels satisfy these criteria in a John Masters fashion.

Besides the sense of identification with English literature, another background aspect of the Indian writer's choice of English as a literary medium has been the intellectual ferment which accompanied the birth of the new India. The 'Indian attachment to English culture', of which Edward Shils talks in The Intellectual Between Tradition and Modernity: The Indian Situation,[26]

26 Comparative Studies in Society and History, Supplement 1, The Hague, Mouton, 1961, p.79.

social, political, and intellectual emancipation which became widespread after World War I, which was expressed in the various phases and factions of the Independence movement, and which was felt strongly by most modern Indian novelists. Shils' claims that English literature brought a sense of emancipation, an admiration for certain western moral values, and the elements of modernity to which the intellectual is attracted, are borne out by such novels as Mulk Raj Anand's The Sword and the Sickle (1942), Bhabani Bhattacharya's Music for Mohini (1952), Kamala Markandaya's Some Inner Fury (1955), Santha Rama Rau's Remember the House (1956), Balachandra Rajan's The Dark Dancer (1959) and S. Menon Marath's The Wound of Spring (1960). These novels also verify Shils' comment that 'In English literature, Indians with a yearning for sensitive personal relations, for personal liberty and responsibility, for a private sphere into which admission was a product of affection and voluntary decision, found a land of their heart's desire' (p.80). The intellectual role of representing the national conscience was first assumed in Indian fiction in English by Anand, D.F. Karaka and K.A. Abbas, and the new generation of post-Independence writers tended to follow in their footsteps. On the other hand, the progressive element in fiction was complemented by the theme of the tension between tradition and modernity which was examined

sympathetically from traditional as well as radical points of view. Also, this theme reflected for some writers their own sense of personal dilemma as intellectuals and as literary nomads writing in a second and non-indigenous language.

Malgonkar's admission in "Purdah and Caste-Marks" that the English-language writer occasionally experiences a counterfeit feeling, 'as though going about with a false caste-mark', epitomises the sense of intellectual dilemma which affects many well-educated Indians. This dilemma is the subject of Shils' sociological case-study, and is introspectively elucidated in Nirad C. Chaudhuri's The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian.

Shils postulates the ambiguity of the modern Indian who is the intellectual heir of the Brahmin and the successor of the sastri, pandit and guru but maintains a cognitive separateness for 'discovering, exploring and contemplating the universe' instead of seeking 'fusion with the principle, already known, which governs the universe' (p.22). The psychological complexity of this ambiguity forms a basis for the characterisation of Rama in Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope, for Balachandra Rajan's hero, Krishnan, in The Dark Dancer and for Narayan's Krishnan in Grateful to Life and Death.[27] By the end of the novel, in each of these cases, the character has rediscovered his cultural tradition and

27 Cp. James Dale, "The Rootless Intellectual in the Novels of R.K. Narayan", University of Windsor Review, I 1965, pp.128-37.

has experienced 'fusion with the principle...which governs the universe'. Chaudhuri, who describes himself as 'a nomad of the industrial age',[28] in The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian conveys with deep feeling the intellectual anguish and confusion of values resulting from the Indo-British duality of the new India. On the other hand, Shils argues that 'the common contention' that the Indian intellectual belongs neither to India nor the west, that he is 'neurotic, schizophrenic, ambivalent, suspended between two worlds and rooted in neither', is 'superficial' (p.61).

This 'contention' has been made with respect to the writer in English: 'he writes in English...to the outside world, or he writes in an Indian language and addresses his own people. He turns outwards or inwards. And in either case his situation is far from satisfactory....always haunted by a sense of loss and estrangement'.[29] He is 'frequently charged at home with misrepresenting the native experience in the interests of foreign popularity'.[30] English is 'in an anomalous position: it is known too well to be regarded as foreign, yet not well enough to be a natural medium of expression'.[31] The Indian writer in English has 'an insecure grip on idiom' and 'his English, however familiarly he uses

28 The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian, Macmillan, 1951, p.262.
29 John Wain, "A Visit to India", Encounter, Vol.XVI No.5 May 1961, p.7.
30 Anon., "The Give-and-Take of English", The Times Literary Supplement, Aug.10 1962, p.568.
31 David McCutchion, "Indian Writing in English", p.45.

it, is a patois';[32] 'the better his English and the higher his intellectual standards, the less accessible is he becoming to his countrymen';[33] he can at best give only 'an idea of what is happening on the fringe',[34] and knows 'an Indian language better than English'.[35]

There is truth in these strictures, and some Indian novels in English are flawed, or fail, for one or more of the above reasons. However, the worth of a literature is determined by its best works, not by the failures and the third-rate. And, in fact, none of the above criticisms seriously detract from the solid achievements of R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, the two best novelists writing in English.

What is often lost sight of when the language controversy rages is that the creative adoption of English is central to the whole situation of 'the intellectual between tradition and modernity', which provides Indian literature with one of its most profound and universal themes. Surely it is not unreasonable that writers who are striving to come to terms with the present and to project a modern outlook, and who are attempting to

32 John Wain, "A Visit to India", pp.6,7.
33 Nirad C. Chaudhuri, "The Indian Intellectual: His Dilemma" (an extract), Writers Workshop, 3 Nov.-Dec. 1960, p.39.
34 K. Kailasapathy and U.R. Anantha Murphy, a letter on Indian vernacular writers to The Times Literary Supplement, Sept.24 1964, p.879.
35 Jyotirmoy Datta, "On Caged Chaffinches and Polyglot Parrots", Quest, No.28 Winter 1960-1, p.27.

reconcile this outlook with indigenous values, should choose English because it is the language of their modernity and contains the vocabulary of emancipation which is a condition of their sensibility. In fact, many novelists bear out Edward Shils' contention that the Indian intellectual possesses a composite culture while accepting within himself such important elements of the Hindu tradition as the filial code, religious consciousness, 'oceanic feeling', aspiration to the third and fourth 'stages', or *asramas*, of withdrawal and renunciation, and a desire for 'Indianization' through the rejection of iconoclastic intellectualism. Alienation in its more obvious forms is manifest in *avant garde* attitudes to caste, poverty, nationalism, 'populism', the western world, and foreign standards.

Undoubtedly the language question is related to profound levels of experience. But what the reader must first of all ask himself is whether the Indian writer's English is a natural and spontaneous expression of his sensibility. Raja Rao provides a good example of this being so. In *Kanthapura* (1938) Raja Rao employs the stream of consciousness technique with a confidence comparable to Virginia Woolf's, but with a rhythmic and idiomatic individuality that is indelibly Indian. In his novels he meaningfully contains the timeless, fluid convolutions of the Hindu consciousness within the linguistic and formal boundaries of the English novel,

and thus achieves—somewhat in the Jamesian sense—a balance between subjective mind and objective form. He also achieves in The Serpent and the Rope what Eliot calls the impersonal emotion of art. Rama explains: 'I am writing the sad and uneven chronicle of a life, my life, with...the "objectivity", the discipline of the "historical sciences"' (p.233). Although the India of the novel is the India of the Sanscrit world picture—'India is an idea, a metaphysic' (p.380)—the language of definition is English. Raja Rao's English is both a rendering and an explicative instrument: while rendering Rama's perceptions within their emotive contexts, the author brings Rama's eclectic mind and mood of tragic sorrow to the literary surface of the novel. His English is a verbal song, or opera, achieving purity of mind and belief; a language of rhythm and poetry, of allusive historical reason and metaphysical paradox.

Raja Rao has also created, especially in Kanthapura, an authentic Indian English which is a living justification of the manifesto for an Indian dialect of English outlined in the Foreword to the novel. The style of Kanthapura is a rich mixture of folk idiom and dialect, archaic inflexion, apocryphal discursiveness, incantatory rhythms, rhetoric, repetition, assonance, epic metaphor, syntactic ingenuity, alliteration, sentence accretion (especially through parenthesis, participial phrases and

repercussive conjunctions), and the poetic arrangement of proper names. Raja Rao's stylistic vitality—his richness and sensitivity to flavour, accent, timbre—contradicts John Wain's assertion that 'Indian English... lacks the fineness of nuance that makes literature possible'.[36]

The attempt to create a distinct Indian style of English is the main platform of the Calcutta Writers Workshop group. P. Lal, the leader of this movement, believes that the true 'Indo-Anglian' poet finds in English the language of his emotional make-up:

> The real writer in English not only thinks, but makes love in English. English is at the tips of his senses.[37]

As an example both of Lal's intention and contention put into practice consider the following poem, "the bronze girl", from his volume the parrot's death and other poems:[38]

> Emperor and dancing girl
> lie in the cracked heat;
> The sun ignores his knuckles,
> the dust is on her anklets.
> Ash, dew, and cricket song.
>
> Singing and the chariot dance
> to brisk hands by the fire:
> Once cornfield and ballad
> and harvest in the heart.
> Till the star-stricken Aryans.

36 "A Visit to India", p.7.
37 "Indian Writing in English A Reply to Mr. Jyotirmoy Datta", Quest, No.29 Spring 1961, p.85.
38 Calcutta, Writers Workshop, 1962.

Ah, a bittersweet geometry
in the peeling moonlight:
Open bathhouses and
a harvest of sand.
Lizard home and beetle home.

Apple-bent, the sun catches
voices like drums clear:
Look here, Kunitz,
a bronze girl. Then silence.
Where the living are dead.

East and West meet in the bronze repose of the emperor's dancing girl and Balachandra Rajan's dark Shivite dancer, on the one hand, and Eliot's and Yeats's mystical and artistic dancers, on the other hand.

Deb Kumar Das claims, on behalf of the 'Workshop' group, that 'Indo-Anglicism' contains such features as: the imputation of new meaningfulness to English words like love, democracy, humour and revolt—thus 'death' has no reality as an 'objective' or universal experience, only as a relationship linking poet and universe; the injection of Indian paradox into English words; the identification of the language world with a metaphysical reality.[39]

It is evident that the English of some writers in Indo-English is hybrid in the sense that a process of

39 "On the Technique of Indo-Anglicism", Writers Workshop, 7 July-August 1961, pp.27-32.

spontaneous translation from mother tongue into English is involved. Mulk Raj Anand declares that Indian writers are

> ...consciously reorientating the language...they are concerned with synthesizing Indian and European values in contemporary India.[40]
> Indians who are accustomed to writing in English...more or less, translate from their mother tongue into English, and...the intrusion of the idiom and metaphor of the Indian languages makes their writing different from the various styles of English writing in Britain and America.[41]

In Srinivasa Iyengar's opinion, this constitutes a special problem for the Indian writer:

> There are peculiarities of Indian life and experience and speech that don't easily admit of translation into English terms. If the translation is not attempted, one fails in one's duty as an Indian; if the attempt doesn't succeed, if the result is an exotic, an oddity, an excrescence or an absurdity, one fails as a writer in English. What is written has to be recognizably Indian to the Indian reader and recognizably English to the English reader.[42]

Certainly in the translation of idiom, in the rendering of dialogue and peasant speech, the novelist must have a good dramatic sense. Thus, for instance, Khushwant Singh's virile dialogue in Train to Pakistan (1956) effectively conjures up the personality of the Sikh

40 The King-Emperor's English, Bombay, Kind Kitabs, 1948, p.20.
41 ibid., p.18.
42 Indian Writing in English, p.20.

peasants who (he told Dom Moraes) "talk in a picturesque, highly coloured kind of speech, and swear very variously and frighteningly well".[43]

Few novelists, however, have created the illusion of dialect so inventively as Raja Rao. Most have preferred to remain within the confines of standard, conservative or stately English and have cultivated prose styles characterised by simplicity and directness—or, if they fail, banality and journalese. R.K. Narayan has proved that the unpretentious style at its Indian best is delicate and sensitive, 'capable'—as McCutchion says—'of concrete precision and subtle modulation of tone'.[44] One reason why simplicity has been a stylistic feature of Indian fiction in English is the prevalence of the unsophisticated character, the peasant, coolie, sepoy, artisan, untouchable etc. Another reason is that folk tones from the vernacular tend insistently to carry over into the English. Through unfamiliarity with eastern psychology the western reader may dismiss as naive insights which, from an Indian point of view, are profound though expressed in beguilingly simple terms. The English-language writer, after all, faces two tests of verisimilitude, Indian and English, and the success with which Narayan has accomplished this tight-rope

43 Gone Away, p.46.
44 "Indian Writing in English (II)", Quadrant, Vol. VIII No.2 1963, p.28.

feat is an encouraging example to other writers.

A significant number of novels bear out Michael Edwardes' contention that the English used by Indian novelists and the way they handle it is "extremely good". Edwardes adds: "Many of them have a fluency—I am thinking of Balachandra Rajan for example".[45] Rajan's fluency consists in part of a Jamesian urbanity and a Jamesian capacity for giving abstractions a concrete existence. Here is a mild example from The Dark Dancer:

> It was at the wedding feast, amid the bangles and the tinsel, the mendicant dreams and the brocaded gossip, when the voice of the singer glissaded, the dancer leaped, and he felt the lurch, the nausea almost, of an absolute loneliness and the abrupt recovery, the sensation of a seed planted, without his knowing what germ it contained, or what demand its darkness would grow into.[46]

The images 'brocaded gossip' and 'a seed planted' strike directly into the heart of Indian life: into the social atmosphere of the ritualistic world of Hindu ceremonial and the eternal cycles of rural life, respectively.

There are, of course, plenty of instances in Indian fiction in English of pedestrian writing, pretentiousness, ornateness, clichés, touristic descriptions and trite or forced sociological comment,

45 From an interview by Baldoon Dhingra, "Indian Writing in English", Writers Workshop, 11 May-Aug.1962, p.32.
46 Heinemann, 1959, p.268.

but such faults should not be confused with the language issue. David McCutchion rightly observes:

> Some of the recurrent arguments of the vernacular writers against the Indo-English writers—that they are shallow, self-inflated, alienated from the people, or have a big eye on the dollar pickings—have nothing to do with the language at all, and might be said of writers anywhere.[47]

His conclusion that 'the deciding factor which produces a great work is not the language but the writer, and there seems to be no a priori reason why great literature should not be written in English by Indians'[48] places the issue in its right perspective.

The Times Literary Supplement's consistent advocacy of the recognition of Indian writing in English as a regional branch of English literature, in the same sense as the Canadian and Australian literatures are, is a just recognition of its identity. But this does not necessarily invalidate it as a branch of Indian literature.

47 "Indian Writing in English", Quadrant, Vol.VI No.4 1962, p.52.
48 ibid.

4 THE ILLUSION AND REALITY OF INDIA

In his essay "The Art of Fiction", Henry James states that the novel is an 'illusion' or 'direct impression' of life and that the experience of life is 'an immense sensibility'. The novelist, writes James in this essay, 'competes with life...to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle'.[49] In the light of these tolerable truths two considerations regarding the Indian novel claim our attention: firstly, that the reality with which the Indian novelist must compete is one of incredible kaleidoscopic diversity and metaphysical, as well as social, complexity; and, secondly, that the special quality of the Indian novel is likely to derive from the special qualities of Indian life and of the 'immense sensibility' of Indian experience.

This is a promising state of affairs, but it may pose a problem for the reader who is unfamiliar with

49 Selected Literary Criticism (edited by Morris Shapira), Penguin Books, 1963, p.87.

the Indian scene and has to contend with aspects of Indian psychology which may seem alien to his experience. The Indian way of distinguishing tangible from intangible qualities of life may appear incomprehensible to the westerner. Also to be taken into account, as Santha Rama Rau reminds us in This is India, are the 'misconceptions about India' and 'the screen of fantasy and half-truths' that have 'grown up between India and the Western world'.[50] Santha Rama Rau refers to the common distortions that promote conceptions of India as a land of fighting men living by a code of honour, revenge and treachery (the now anachronistic Yeats-Brown and Kipling school), as a land of the primitive (the 'Mother India' school), and as a land of mystics and holy men.

For his part, the writer has the problem of communicating exoterically without distorting India in the eyes of his countrymen. He has to guard against manufacturing spurious exoticism and reducing his vision of India to the map of misconceptions to which Santha Rama Rau refers. It is desirable, as well, that the Indian reader should not bring to the novel a prejudice against the English language and that the non-Indian reader should not bring to it the prejudice of his inherited sociological assumptions.

50 New York, Harper, 1954, p.17.

Most novelists are aware of these considerations, and are conscious of their advantage in having before them an immediate immensity of life. Thus Khushwant Singh says he "would prefer to be in India now, as a novelist, than anywhere else",[51] and means by India mainly the villages where "there's so much material":

"From that point of view this sort of country is far preferable to England, say. The London novelists write city novels, sex and sorrow and a lot of psychology for padding: novels about a certain way of life. In a country like India one has the material of life itself."[52]

This Indian reality, it would seem, begins with the conventional image of a venerable, wise, spiritual, unsophisticated Mother India, a land of contrast, paradox, ambiguity and contradiction, of old and new, of monsoon and monsoon-waiting, of dust-bowl plain and strangling jungle, of public worship and public defecation, of poverty and the parade of riches, of caste, festival and the interminable ritual of birth, marriage and cremation, of bullock carts and glass bangles, of confusion, mystery and religious lore; a land where non-violence is preached and violence practised, where life and death are assaultingly bare, where (as it strikes one visitor) 'the patched-up, shredded odds and ends of different civilizations' are

51 Dom Moraes, Gone Away, p.46. 52 ibid., p.47.

'all flung together in one unassimilable mass'.[53] Yet it must be remembered that there is illusion as well as reality in this image of India.

Notably, most novels—whether in English or the vernacular—begin with this image, as the following opening lines of novels (chosen at random) show: 'I was born a Brahmin—that is, devoted to Truth and all that.'[54] 'The Maulavi Sahib's venerable beard was a source of never-ending wonder to Anwar.[55] 'Night, like the heart of the lover, conceals within it the mystery of life.'[56] 'The outcastes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses...'[57] 'It was mid-monsoon, and on the Padma, the height of the hilsa season.'[58] 'All day the body lay rotting in the sun.'[59] 'Mrs. Radha Chakravarty and her daughter Amrita sat in a tonga.'[60] 'They were burning British garments.'[61]

53 John Wain, "A Visit to India", p.9.
54 Raja Rao, The Serpent and the Rope, p.7.
55 Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Inqilab, Bombay, Jaico Publishing House, 1953, p.5.
56 Ahmed Ali, Ocean of Night, Peter Owen, 1964, p.7.
57 Mulk Raj Anand, Untouchable, Bombay, Kutub-Popular (no date), p.1.
58 Manik Bannerjee, Boatman of the Padma (translated from the Bengali by Hirendranath Mukerjee), Bombay, Kutub, 1948, p.7.
59 Anita Desai, Cry, the Peacock, Peter Owen, 1963, p.5
60 R. Prawer Jhabvala, To Whom She Will, George Allen and Unwin, 1956, p.7.
61 Manohar Malgonkar, A Bend in the Ganges, Hamish Hamilton, 1964, p.1.

'It was evening of the last day of Onam, the harvest festival of Malabar.'[62] 'From time immemorial people seemed to have called him "Margayya".'[63] 'The summer of 1947 was not like other Indian summers.'[64]

In attempting to define his image of India, the English-language novelist is faced with the temptation of interpolating into his narrative information for the benefit of the foreign reader. He can, accordingly, fall perilously between Melvillean documentary audacity and sociological propaganda. Although Khushwant Singh is well aware, as he says, that the 'consciousness of a foreign audience' is a 'pitfall into which many Indian novelists fall'[65] he does not always prevent himself from so falling, as is illustrated by the following pedagogic extracts from I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale:[66]

To know India and her peoples, one has to know the monsoon. It is not enough to read about in in books, or see it on the cinema screen, or hear someone talk about it....

Those who mean to experience it should come to India some time in March or April. (p.101)

An Indian's attitude to clouds and rain remains fundamentally different from that of a European. (p.103)

S. Menon Marath, The Wound of Spring, Dennis Dobson, 1960, p.1.

62 ~~T.S. Pillai, Chemmeen (translated by Narayana Menon), Calicut, 1962, p.1.~~

63 R.K. Narayan, The Financial Expert, New York, The Noonday Press, 1968, p.1.

64 Khushwant Singh, Train to Pakistan, Four Square Books, 1961, p.5.

65 "After the Raj", New Statesman, Vol.60 10 Sept.1960, p.348.

66 John Calder, 1959.

Even though the monsoon is relevant to Singh's characterisation, particularly in the way that it releases erotic tension, the above information is artificially explanatory and tacked on. Singh fares better and more artistically in Train to Pakistan. Although he explains,

> Monsoon is not another word for rain. As its original Arabic name indicates, it is a season. There is a summer as well as a winter monsoon... (p.32)

this is a prelude to three pages of relevant description in electric prose. This description serves to build up atmosphere, to define the villagers' primal relationship with their environment, and to exploit pathetic fallacy in enlarging on the novel's violent theme.

In the main, the abundance of ethnographic, social and environmental detail in Indian fiction in English is interesting and relevant. Thus, although 'European readers' may 'find the background...remote and alien', as Kamala Markandaya says, 'there is, after all, universality in human suffering and human experience'.[67] Indeed when man in the Indian novel is seen in his relation to the natural world, to society and to the cosmic order, he is portrayed in his fundamental universality.

As part of the Indian reality, nature is a powerful

67 In the letter to me dated 16th October, 1964.

presence, and in the depictions of their physical world Indian writers have forged their own characteristic idiom. 'Their language' William Walsh says, 'has been freed of the foggy taste of Britain and transferred to a wholly new setting of brutal heat and brilliant light'.[68] This idiom, as Balachandra Rajan demonstrates on the opening page of The Dark Dancer, captures the 'enmity' of sun and earth':

> In the distance, hazing, and under the white blaze of midday almost venemous, the sheer rock of the temple rose with the houses clustered round it...proclaiming the pride and defiance of the earth. (p.1)

A common image in Indian novels is the primeval contest for survival, the struggle of a civilization with the environmental hostility of (as Chaudhuri puts it) 'the Vampire of Geography'.[69]

The man-nature struggle is, not unexpectedly, an important theme in the Indian novel. In folk terms, it develops as a kind of Greek slaves' tragedy with a homiletic Hindu chorus of resignation. Man is a victim of fate in the guise of nature and therefore stands in perilous relation to the gods. Yet, despite the periodic severity of nature, story after story reiterates that the peasant who is divorced from the land, however cruel the agricultural existence may be, loses his identity.

68 "Nataraja & the Packet of Saffron The Indian Novel in English", Encounter, Vol. XXIII No. 4 Oct.1964, p.78.

69 The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian, p.502.

This traditional folk theme has been revitalised by many modern writers. Humayun Kabir's Men and Rivers (1945), as he explains in a Prefatory Note to the novel,[70] is based on an ancient legend of East Bengal and the centuries-old experiences of the 'children of the soil':

Men have loved and suffered since the beginning of time, and will do so for as long as we can perceive. The endurance and fortitude of these children of the soil have heroic proportions....India still lives in her villages, and to understand India the world must learn her villages.

In Kamala Markandaya's peasant novel, Nectar in a Sieve (1954), Nature is described as 'a wild animal'. The peasant narrator says, 'look away for an instant, be heedless or forgetful, and it has you by the throat'.[71] Santha Rama Rau in her introduction to Pillai's Chemmeen refers to the power of life and death exercised over the 'Common Man' by natural forces:

Under these merciless conditions, inevitably a merciless deity rules over life. To people brought up on the phrase "God is good", it may not be easy to accept the Indian idea, "The Creator is also the Destroyer."

But, to the Indian mind, it is inevitable that the cyclic course of nature should mirror the divine Hindu

70 New India Publishing Co.,1947.
71 The New English Library, 1962, p.43.

pattern of Creation (Brahma), Destruction (Shiva) and Preservation (Vishnu). These concepts contain a wealth of accessible meaning and are to be found somewhere in the background of most Indian novels in English. They also relate to the Indian tragic sense, as Chaudhuri points out in The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian:

> In our existence growth and decay have been intermingled and parallel: we have seen life and death interlocked in an inseparable embrace; we have lived with mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage. But the hour has come when life, if there has ever been any principle of life in us, must part company with its baleful mate and go its way. The marriage can no longer endure. Either we end it to be restored to cleanliness, or it ends itself in a witches' sabbath. (p.130)

Nevertheless, Hinduism conceives of nature, of the tragedy of life, and of evil as ultimately illusory, as Maya, and attempts to generate a religious feeling strong enough to accept and spiritually overcome the trials of existence. This attitude of acceptance is basic to the world of Indian fiction, though the novelists, in their own attitudes to this particular attitude, range from acceptance and philosophical justification to defiance and social protest.

Authors in the latter group remind the reader that India is, in Nehru's words, 'a poor man's country', and that extreme poverty is very much part of the Indian reality. This poverty haunts V.S. Naipaul's An Area

of Darkness so persistently that his 'Experience of India' becomes a burden of self-lacerating frustration, an excremental vision of Swiftian intensity. In Naipaul's book a profound tension results from his own affronted humanity, his sense of compassionate outrage (fear, distaste, anger, contempt, disgust), confronted by the psychological mechanism of negation (exclusion, denial, non-seeing) which he claims enables the Indian to ignore the obvious[72] and thereby remain sane.

Of the Indian novelists writing in English, Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya have probably done most to make the degradation of poverty a harrowing and significant theme. Probably Bhabani Bhattacharya in So Many Hungers! (1947) has written the most passionate indictment of the human culpability involved in famine. The novel throbs with the pain of pain aware. There is in the author no denial or non-seeing, but he effectively portrays the non-seeing of others—particularly the wealthy and upper-class Calcutta parasites who exploit the Bengal famine to make black-market fortunes.

Closely related to the problem of poverty, and an integral part of the Indian reality, is caste. Many observers, in fiction as well as in sociology, see in

72 Cp.Ved Mehta, Walking the Indian Streets, Faber and Faber, 1961, p.43: 'If one is not a saint, one must grow callous to the life around one and wander through India tongueless, with eyes shut, ears punctured'.

caste ever-receding degrees of degradation, a brutal division of labour which has at its centre the social and economic humiliations of the sweeper. Such novels as Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable (1935) and Bhabani Bhattacharya's He Who Rides a Tiger (1954), in which caste provides the basis of each story, condemn the iniquities and hypocrisies of the caste system. Untouchability is seen by both novelists as a tragedy of socially-blighted humanity, but Anand employs documentary realism to develop a sociological point of view, whereas Bhattacharya's theme is developed more in terms of irony. On the other hand, there are some novelists like R.K. Narayan who do not set out specifically to analyse sociological problems. They would probably share the view expounded by Santha Rama Rau that the western idea of the ineradicability of caste as a result of incorrigible fatalism fails to appreciate that there is caste of some sort in all societies, and that the 'ultimate aim of the Hindu...is not "happiness" in the Western sense but the absence of desire'.[73]

Like R.K. Narayan, Ahmed Ali, Attia Hosain, Balachandra Rajan and Santha Rama Rau, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala takes her main characters and subjects from middle-class life. She finds the highly ordered nature of Indian society particularly advantageous from the literary point of view, and explores the encounter

73 This is India, pp.82-3.

of character and code in domestic and suburban zones. Jhabvala has said India is "a wonderful field for subject matter" because of "this very strong Society which you don't have anywhere else in the world...none of the Western countries has this very strong social code".[74] She is a mellow social satirist who never overreaches her social understanding and sensitive awareness of character. Perhaps her most authentic novel, from an Indian point of view, is The Householder (1960) which impartially and sympathetically tells a story that is both very real and very common in the new India. It is the story of Prem and Indu. They are newly married. Prem is a school teacher nervously conscious that the young university graduate in India lives on the brink of professional and financial insecurity. Indu has led a traditional domestic-cloistered life; she is shy and misses her mother.

The following description of Prem, defining his ambition as a desire for the security of Government employment, points to the circumscriptions and frustrations which many young Indians are heir to, and also gives some idea of the way the novelist focuses character with respect to social background:

> Prem lingered on the veranda and felt excluded. All these men were Government servants, graded correctly according to their official standing, with salaries and increments laid down precisely, with so many days sick leave a year, with a dearness allowance and family allowance apportioned to them. They belonged here, among the regulation chairs and tables

74 John Thompson, "Indian Accent".

and grass screens; they had their allotted share in the working of files and ordinances, and when they retired, they were given a pension which was in a fixed and settled ratio to what they had been earning all their working lives.

Prem wanted very much to be one of them. If one succeeded in getting into government service, one's future was settled; there was nothing more to fear. And one belonged somewhere, one was part of something bigger than oneself. That was just what Prem wanted: he felt a great need to be absorbed. He knew that this could never happen to him in Khanna Private College, for Khanna Private College was neither big nor impartial enough. But Government was: it was like a stern kind father who supported his children and demanded nothing in return but their subservience.[75]

The phrase 'he felt a great need to be absorbed' defines a fundamental feeling which permeates various spheres of Indian life: religion, the land, the village, the poverty classes, the joint-family, as well as the urban office.

Indian fiction often portrays man experiencing nature, poverty, caste, code, tradition and urban claustrophobia in unhappy combination. This suggests that it is not altogether surprising that the so-called Indian negation would seem to be a common attitude to reality, and that stoicism or resignation or non-seeing should be preferred to the insanity of hopeless opposition. It seems like Hamlet's question and evasion all over again, though 'To be, or not to be' was posed in Sanscrit long before Shakespeare.

75 The Householder, John Murray, 1960, p.138.

Judging by Indian fiction and various contributions to Indian studies, Negation, like the Hindu divinity, has a multitude of attributes: resignation, denial, acceptance, fatalism, withdrawal, passivity, fantasy, world-weariness, moral turpitude, rejection of concern, submission to the past, a preference for symbolic or mythic rather than pragmatic action, a rigid compartmentalisation of mores alongside an unwillingness to make definitions concerning life. This negation has been variously interpreted, on the one hand, as a vision of decay and a philosophy of despair and, on the other hand, as a philosophic step towards renunciation of illusory attachments, extinction of self, and ultimate spiritual fulfilment.

It is perhaps interesting to observe in passing that 'negation' in both these affirmative and negative senses, and in terms of the 'mystery' or 'muddle' question mark, is at the heart of Forster's A Passage to India. Negation is at the core both of the Caves, and of Indo-British relationships which terminate with horses, earth and sky saying 'No'. Adela Quested experiences negation and temporarily loses her reason; Mrs. Moore experiences it and drifts towards death. The negation which infects Adela is Maya (the snake that was in fact a stick, the echo in her head) and it was not until she faced the truth (not absolute Truth which remains vague), with the

psychic help of Mrs. Moore, that she is freed from her paralysis of moral perception—she sheds illusion and the echo disappears. Mrs. Moore's experience of Maya, however, transcends the dramatic context of the novel and is therefore not resolved within a concrete narrative situation as is the case with Adela; rather, her experience belongs to the private mystical moment (eventually inaccessible to the intellectually honest novelist) and enters the world of becoming, the Forsterian 'expansion'. Mrs. Moore sees Maya at the heart of reality: the 'Boum' that reduced all divine Christian words to meaninglessness, while the Hindu 'Om' lingers; the union of flame with flame, and in between the serpent descending from and returning to the ceiling, the sky vault—illusion coiling in the eternal cycles of reality. This complex experience leads Mrs. Moore to rejection of the familial concern and thence to the asrama of renunciation and beyond Forster's rationality into the world of his ambiguous imagination. Through sheer honesty, Forster is never able to make quite clear whether Mrs. Moore's experience of negation leads to despair or spiritual release, despite such wish-fulfilment hints as her deification outside the court room and her symbolic reincarnation in Part III.

The metaphysics of negation and illusion constitutes a very Indian element in the background of Indian fiction

in English, whether as psychological atmosphere, theme or a barrier to social progress. Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope, as the symbolism of the title suggests, deals with the reality-illusion theme from a Brahminical point of view. In Balachandra Rajan's The Dark Dancer this theme is expressed in terms of Shiva's mythological dance: 'Creation, Destruction. Two concepts, but one dance' (p.29). A similarmood, according to V.S. Naipaul, is to be found in stone carvings:

> Sex as pain, creation its own decay: Shiva, god of the phallus, performing the dance of life and the dance of death: what a concept he is, how entirely of India![76]

The novels of R.K. Narayan might be called comedies of Karma. Narayan portrays the attitude of acceptance as a charmingly ironic, but genuinely deep, aspect of Hindu sensibility, and relates the complex fate of the individual not to an Indian negation of life but rather to an Indian affirmation of life. In his characters yearning for Nirvana is generally complemented by a cunning pragmatism with regard to human relationships and social considerations. The The social realist school of Indian writing in English, however, taking its cue from Anand, attacks the social,

76 An Area of Darkness, Andre Deutsch,1964, p.215.

political and economic abuses which result from other-worldliness, and regards common negative attitudes to life as the consequence of reactionary orthodoxies in Indian society. This school opposes metaphysics with Marxism. In between is 'spiritual socialism', as Ved Mehta terms it, and which he maintains 'is to be the great gift of India to political thought'.

But the traditional Indian world-view, after all, is in the bloodstream of modern life. As recently as 1934 the anonymous author of Letters of an Indian Judge to an English Gentlewoman writes of 'dark rites of some appeal'. 'I still sometimes bow to the Priestess of Ancient Custom',[77] this author says. Robin White speaks of the literary consequences of the fact that India's ancient past exerts, in his words, 'an extra-ordinary influence on modern India which is trying to grapple with a host of imponderable, external influences in a period of complex and chaotic transition'. White is of the opinion that: 'If anything is to distinguish Indian fiction...it would be the varied literary attempt to portray this conflict of the contemporary Indian and his past'.[78] This conflict is certainly a major theme in quite a few novels: for example, Ahmed Ali's Twilight in Delhi (1940), Bhabani Bhattacharya's Music for Mohini (1952), Santha Rama Rau's Remember the House

77 Letters of an Indian Judge to an English Gentlewoman, Lovat Dickson, 1934, p.85.
78 "Fiction in India", p.59.

(1956), S. Menon Marath's The Wound of Spring (1960), Kamala Markandaya's A Silence of Desire (1960), Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column (1961), Manohar Malgonkar's The Princes (1963).

So far as the more immediate past is concerned, the contemporary Indian's sense of personal alienation and loss of identity, as a result of the historical and cultural dislocation suffered by modern India, has been summed up by Ved Mehta in the following way:

> Everyone must belong, yet those of us who were born in the twilight of the British Raj were wounded for life....the setting of the British sun left us with an intellectual contempt for English values, but emotionally we were too far committed to withdraw, and our whole generation was sacrificed to a country in transition. We were condemned to live with a permanent hangover.[79]

How this hangover was acquired is an important subject in the work of such writers of Ved Mehta's generation as Kamala Markandaya, Attia Hosain, Khushwant Singh, and Manohar Malgonkar.

On the whole, the more Indian-hearted and less Western-minded the novelist, the more detached and comprehensive his perspective on the conflict between present and past tends to be. This partly explains R.K. Narayan's strength and relevance as a novelist.

79 Walking the Indian Street, p.10.

That another of Narayan's novelistic strengths is characterisation serves as a reminder that an important background to Indian novels is the complex connection between fictional representations of people and prevalent notions within Indian society about what constitutes character, particularly with respect to Hindu and Muslim codes of conduct and standards of behaviour.

Some critics insist on seeing in Indian society unique circumstances which discourage effective characterisation in fiction. Comments in this line range sociologically from the general to the less general. Mahendra Kulasnestha describes India's 'social system' as 'the greatest obstacle to progress of all kinds' and claims that this 'crisis of values' exists 'all the more so among writers and artists'.[80] Hamdi Bey makes a similar claim, suggesting that because of a backward social system novelists are unable to evaluate 'Indian life from a modern universal ethics'[81] and that consequently their work fails as literature. The fallacies underlying both points of view, however, ought to be quite obvious. It is yet to be proven that the production of art is dictated and determined by a unique set of social circumstances or by a special kind of social progress. Art has flourished in too

80 "Letter from India", Landfall 65, Vol.17 No.1 March 1963, p.58.
81 "Dilemma of the Indian novelist", p.12.

many different societies and sets of social circumstance for Kulasnestha's argument to carry much weight. As for Bey's opinion, surely it is naive as well as silly to presume for all writers a simple, identical ethical standpoint.

Yet many commentators maintain that the Indian experience and environment, compared with that of the west, is not conducive to sophisticated characterisation. Dorothy Spencer believes that characterisation in the Indian novel iswewakened by 'the lack of a close inter-relationship in Indian conceptualization', particularly the absence of the western assumption 'that character is destiny, that what a man is as an individual, and what he does, what happens to him, are closely linked'.[82] She also makes the inaccurate conventional generalisation that the Indian mind, with its tendency to abstraction, lacks real interest in human motive and individual character. Monroe K. Spears also finds Indian novels deficient in this regard: 'A curious kind of emptiness and negativeness results apparently from inability to feel the fate of the individual as really important'.[83] Various sociological factors, especially the absence of freedom that results from strong social pressures and demands, have been said to have an adverse effect on characterisation. Spencer

82 Indian Fiction in English, pp.29-30.
83 "Three Indian Novels", The Yale Review, Vol.48 Spring 1958, p.119.

instances the subordination of the individual to the group, the definition of character according to institutionalised 'role-expectations' (i.e. status, caste mores, etc.), and the socially pre-determined nature of impersonal relations.

Hamdi Bey ("Dilemma of the Indian novelist") is in substantial agreement. He argues that Indian social oppression prevents individual 'emancipation' with the result that the fictional character is not morally and psychologically identifiable with his actions. Bey claims that character in the Indian novel is subject only to the impersonal motivations of society and therefore is 'unfree', and automaton. Bey, however, also bases his criticism on the narrow and dubious premise that 'Where the individual is not in conflict with the collective there is only scope for delineation of tradition, but not of character' (pp.12-3). He also accuses the novelists of not living out their social protest against the restriction of personal freedom and decision in such matters as marriage, love, family, food, drink, social intercourse etc., and therefore of accepting the dictates of their society. Bey also claims that the Indian novel reduces the 'prolonged sufferings of the soul' and the 'heavy sense of guilt' (p.12) of the western novel to a ritual of penance.

Accepting that the critical charges mentioned above are based on sociological rather than literary assumptions,

they can be answered in four main ways. Firstly, there are notable exceptions: Narayan's novels portray round characters credibly and flat characters effectively, while Raja Rao adapts western experience in the use of the internal point of view and the stream of consciousness technique to create characters who are intellectually vivid and psychologically subtle. Secondly, many Indian novelists have found in the conflict between social pressure and personal desire an enlightening basis for the examination of character. Thirdly, such metaphysical assumptions as transcendance of self which underlie the cramping social circumstances to which the critics refer make for meaningful and interesting depictions of character, either from Narayan's ironical viewpoint or Raja Rao's classical viewpoint. And fourthly, social variety and rigidity—as Dickens found—makes for an interesting range of types and an impressive sense of the human largeness of life.

The Indian novelist, after all, has an abundance of human raw material to work with, and has the advantage of a traditional frame of reference—concepts like Maya, Karma, Dharma and Moksh—which is still psychologically meaningful to his characters. The psychological, cultural and moral death of tradition in the west has been a cause for constant lamentation among most of its notable writers this century. It should not be forgotten that T.S. Eliot's reputation

in India has been, and continues to be, enormous.

It is absurd to assume that man in a traditional society is not sufficiently interesting or 'free' to be an adequate subject for three-dimensional literary characterisation, but that the reverse is uniquely the case in a modern western progressive society. A good literary work is primarily the product of an individual talent and sensibility, and it is the quality of that sensibility which determines the quality of the work that results from it. All the human traits, the vices and virtues, are as accessible to the Indian novelist as they are to the American or English novelist. And, as for the suffocating code repressions the Indian individual is subjected to, one only has to quote from a sociologist to appreciate the extent to which this provides fascinating human material from which the novelist can fashion a work of art. Consider, as an example, the following extract from G. Morris Carstairs' The Twice-Born, A Study of a Community of High-Caste Hindus:

In order to understand these very real complaints of weakness, of wasting-away of the bodily tissues (which looked unchanged to the corporeal eye) it was necessary that my patients should communicate their sense of guilt at having broken the rules, with regard to sex, and commensality, and control of their feelings. As they did so, I was made aware of another dilemma; these rules were so uncompromisingly strict that anyone whose personality resisted the complete surrender of instinctive spontaneity, must sooner or later infringe

them. My informants acknowledged this by describing two types of ideal person, the unworldly religious devotee, and the practical man. Only the former could rise to the acme of physical and spiritual perfection. To the Yogi's undoubted ability to endure physical privation with indifference were added magical powers, such as the ability to practise levitation, to become invisible, to be present in the flesh in two places at once.[84]

If proof is required that this is wonderful psychological material for the novelist, there is no need to look beyond the novels of R.K. Narayan, or even beyond his The Guide (1958) in which Raju, the 'reluctant holy man', turns out unexpectedly to be the kind of 'ideal person' in whom is blended 'the unworldly religious devotee' and 'the practical man'—but only after he has 'broken the rules' regarding 'sex', 'commensality' and 'control' of his 'feelings'.

India is, in James's words, 'an immense sensibility', a paradoxical synthesis of illusion and reality. And there is no doubt that it provides the creative writer with an exciting imaginative challenge, inviting him to compete with life, 'to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle'. A critical task central to the ensuing discussion is to see how, and how well, a large number of Indian novelists writing in English—but Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao in particular—accept this challenge.

84 Hogarth, 1961, p.86.

II MULK RAJ ANAND

1 INTRODUCTORY

Born in 1905, Mulk Raj Anand is almost an exact contemporary of such British novelists as Henry Green, Graham Greene, Christopher Isherwood, Anthony Powell and C.P. Snow, and of such American novelists as James T. Farrell, John O'Hara and Robert Penn Warren. In terms of productivity Anand rivals even the most prolific of these writers. He now has to his credit thirteen novels (apart from drafts of quite a few others as yet unpublished), at least five volumes of short stories besides uncollected pieces, and numerous non-fictional works. Mulk Raj Anand's life and writings testify to his participation and achievement in a variety of fields—fiction, journalism, editorship, publishing, the academic profession, art, philosophy, literary criticism, oriental studies, drama, film, radio, politics, social welfare, administration. Nevertheless, Anand's most ambitious mode of expression has been fiction. His novels in order of publication are Untouchable (1935), Coolie (1936), Two Leaves and a Bud (1937), Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts (1939),

The Village (1939), Across the Black Waters (1940), The Sword and the Sickle (1942), The Big Heart (1945), Seven Summers (1951), Private Life of an Indian Prince (1953), The Old Woman and the Cow (1960), The Road (1961), Death of a Hero (1963).

Anand's literary output alone may invite claims that he possesses that Indian genius for creative versatility and that universalist outlook which we associate with Rabindranath Tagore. Referring to his intentions as a novelist, Anand recently remarked:

> I believe the Indian universalist attitude enables a writer to comprehend the problem of the individual, at least symbolically from anywhere, because of the sanctions in the human centre.[1]

This being the case, it is necessary to distinguish in his work not only quality from quantity but also clarity from vagueness, and to establish precisely what universalist attitudes and individual problems are presented in his novels and whether he achieves convincingly a sense of human and moral proportion. Bearing these points in mind one can both appreciate Anand's contribution to the development of the Indian sociological novel in English and also evaluate that contribution in a critically-valid way.

The first point to be considered is Anand's prolificacy. This has resulted in some sturdy merits and maiming defects which a first reading of his novels

1 In a letter to me dated 23rd October, 1965.

makes quite apparent. The sheer bulk of his fiction—its social, historical, and geographical range—conveys in crowded background colours and human detail the epic vastness of India, particularly at the proletarian level. Thus Anand has written on a variety of Indian themes, many of which he pioneered in the English novel.

Among his major preoccupations, of course, are caste, poverty, the travails of the common man as peasant, coolie, untouchable, artisan, or soldier, the social basis of evil, and the human potentialities of love, compassion, and goodness. India's cultural dichotomy is examined in all its major phases of conflict: (1) man-tradition (the contemporary Indian at odds with his past); (2) East-West (India's cultural duality, its attendant strains and alienations); (3) man-society (the ordinary conflict between social pressure and personal desire in the light of caste and Indian ideals of renunciation and other-worldliness); (4) man-nature (the geographical ordeals of India and the power exercised over man by natural forces); and (5) man-fate (hereditary fatalism inhibiting human progress). Anand's trilogy—The Village, Across the Black Waters, The Sword and the Sickle—is epic in intention and scope; it was conceived as an Indian War and Peace. In the trilogy Anand attempts to tell the story of modern India from the first decade of the twentieth century to the full-blooded emergence of the

Independence movement, and to relate this evolution to the condition of Europe at the time. Thus the First World War in Europe is the subject of Across the Black Waters. As the trilogy's historical thesis is Marxist, Anand sees the launching of Indian nationalism and the potential emancipation of the proletariat as the most important Indian consequences of both the disintegration of the old order in Europe and the Russian Revolution. Fairly judged, the trilogy is more important for what it attempts, than what it fails to do.

Such breadth of subject-matter, then, resulted from a corresponding depth of intention. In Apology for Heroism Anand recalls that he first decided to write 'with a view to discovering the causes of the mental and material chaos in India and the world, and of my own failure as well as the failure of my generation in the face of it'.[2] He adds that this involved facing 'the problem of politics and economics, particularly the wretchedness of the human beings in India which had been the background of my early life' (pp.50-1). Here, defined more specifically, are the 'universalist attitude', 'problem of the individual', and 'sanctions in the human centre' quoted earlier. However, the very magnitude of Anand's humanistic aspiration inevitably led to some failures through over-reaching (can Munoo in Coolie, for example, adequately carry the weight of Anand's world-view?), uneven performances

2 Bombay, Kutub-Popular, 1957, pp.47-8. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

(compared with Coolie, The Old Woman and the Cow is badly written), and, particularly in commentary, lapses into the clichés and banality of pamphleteering prose and into the tendentious rhetoric of ideological spokesmen like Shankar in Private Life of an Indian Prince. Speaking through Shankar, and turning the novel into tract, Anand often sounds like this:

...substituting psychology for morality, I had dissolved the values of my inheritance and was experimenting with the new and tentative hypothesis of liberal individualism which concedes free will to every person, even though that person may be determined by his or her own subjectivism.[3]

Probably if Anand had written fewer books without diminishing the literary energy he has expended, he would have reduced the amount of slipshod writing which is to be found in his work. Verisimilitude in dialogue is no excuse for bad writing—a fault he is sometimes guilty of. Nor do the exigencies of the folk style excuse pedestrian prose. The following passage, chosen at random from The Old Woman and the Cow, illustrates this latter kind of defect:

But Panchi was inconsolable and his suppressed sobs and prayers were drowned in the whispers of the people. The throb of the beetles created an atmosphere of doom. The pressure of Rafique Chach's arm around his waist alone relieved Panchi's anguish, though he would not have

3 Private Life of an Indian Prince, Hutchinson, 1953, p.127. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

wanted the potter to give him even an iota of more sympathy, for he would have broken down completely.[4]

In the end, the above faults and merits of prolificacy balance each other. On the one hand Anand has tended to sacrifice artistic quality and discipline for quantitative expression and moral urgency. On the other hand, however, it can be appreciated that a novelist of his sociological preoccupations, impressed by the universality of human experience, felt the need of an extensive canvas for conveying the complex ethnic reality which is India.

Further general considerations which, by way of introduction to Anand the novelist, need to be taken into account are his achievement as a literary pioneer, his affinities with the Thirties generation, and his evolution as a 'committed writer'. An examination of these matters will make clear what Anand means when he applies to his own work such terms as 'universalist attitude', 'the problem of the individual', and 'the sanctions in the human centre'.

As the Indian novel in English barely existed when Anand was writing his early fiction, and as he was the first novelist writing in English to choose as his raw material the lower-class life of the Indian masses, he had an influence on the conception and practice of the novel in India that he would not have had by writing solely within the established literary tradition of

4 Bombay, Kutub-Popular, 1960, pp.89-90. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

England. To this extent the limitations of Anand's novels (for example there are times when his language of direct attack seems crude alongside the sophisticated art of innovators like Lawrence, Joyce and Faulkner) were advantageous in the Indian situation where the basic techniques of the novel were yet to be assimilated. Of greater value than verbal virtuosity in the Indian apprenticeship were the adoption of realism, external accuracy in the presentation of character, and the capacity to conceive a true-to-life down-to-earth plot which had moral and social relevance. Anand incorporated these elements into a concept of the novel which derived from the kind of social-realist mode which has flourished in Europe and was fashionable in the Thirties.

An important innovating feature of Anand's realism lies in the freedom from folk sentimentality, stereotyped mysticism and Victorian phraseology which he achieved in portraying the common man in his rural and urban settings. Compare, for example, K.S. Venkataramani's portrayal of a 'Pariah' in "My Little Arunalam", a sketch from Paper Boats (1921), and Anand's in Untouchable. Both writers are socially exceptional in their intense sympathy for the Pariah and in their perception of his humanity, but the reality of Arunalam as an individual and of his experiences as an outcaste is ignored. Arunalam is an extension of the author's sympathy lost in a haze of idealised romantic rusticity, a primal creature ('Nature's well-built child') in a cosmic setting:

Arunalam is as unlettered as Vayu and Varuna—the primal elements of Nature. The schools and colleges are no more for him than they are for the ocean that rolls in tidal waves, the wind that blows wherever it listeth, the stars that twinkle because of innate iridescence. The barrenness of brick and mortar—and modern life, he avoids even their shadow....

He is always a message of Labour and Love to our ancient land....Over his fields, never weary of watching like Cerberus, he is wedded perhaps to the friendly twinkles of distant Orion. The raptures of his life are the verities of a fixed orbit of labour, even as the diurnal rounds of the earth.[5]

Anand, on the other hand, reveals the hideous actuality—the excremental ideology of contamination—underlying the so-called 'verities of a fixed orbit of labour'. He also portrays caste in terms of the subjective experience through the eyes of the sweeper Bakha, the central character in Untouchable. Thus Anand simulates Bakha's dawning articulate consciousness of his contemptibility in society's eyes in a language simple and unsophisticated, as it has to be to be realistically in tune:

"They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate it too.... That's why they don't touch us, the high-castes.... Untouchable! That's the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!"[6]

This is a subjectively true moment in which the former unconsciously accepting self now recognises and knows

5 Paper Boats, Madras, S. Viswanathan, 1952, p.37.
6 Bombay, Kutub-Popular (reprint, no date), p.38. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

itself. Through Bakha's frustrated longings for education, dignity, and self-respect, through his diminishing naivety and inchoate perceptions, we are shown that there is no virtue or primal grandeur in illiteracy, squalor, the humility of sweeping literally for thrown-down bread and left-overs, and in being, however well-built a child of nature, a prey to abuse, disease and premature death. Realism of this kind is not purely a literary structure, an inverted romance, because Anand's choice of the downtrodden person as protagonist in this instance was not dictated primarily by commitment to a literary-political platform but by his own observation of life around him.

In "The Story of My Experiment With a White Lie",[7] about how Untouchable came to be written, Anand explains that he modelled Bakha on an untouchable boy he remembered from childhood. In fact an actual occasion recalled by Anand, when this boy 'carried me home when I had been hit by a stone...without caring about what my mother would say about his having polluted me by his touch', is incorporated into the novel;[8] and Anand remembers this as 'one of the instances of his love for physically weaker people' in view of which 'I developed a guilt about him which compelled appeasement' (p.18). Thus, in effect, an experience from real life resulting in a sense of guilt, about someone who epitomised the plight

7 Indian Literature, Vol.X No. 3 1967, pp.16-30.
8 See Untouchable, pp.95-6.

of India's underprivileged, prompted Anand to write his first novel. Clearly, his intention was sociological, his basic method realistic. Indeed, this is further confirmed by the fact that he took a draft of the novel to Gandhi in 1932, because of the stand taken by Gandhi on the Untouchable question, and that he stayed for a time in Gandhi's Ashram at Ahmedabad where he redrafted Untouchable. There, according to "The Story of My Experiment Witha White Lie", Anand also cleaned latrines and realised that the ''spiritual' experience of the Gandhi Ashram had to be communicated' (p.25) in his novel. A Gandhi rally, where Bakha listens with passionate interest and partial comprehension to Gandhi advocating the eradication of untouchability, provides the climax of Untouchable; and the novel ends with Bakha feeling a new destiny stirring within him. Thus, not only does Untouchable represent the first significant attempt by an Indian writing in English to portray the outcaste realistically; it also anticipated the impact that Gandhiism and Nehru socialism were to make on the socially-conscious writers of a subsequent generation.

At the same time, it is misleading to view Anand's growth as a novelist entirely in Indian terms, especially when one remembers that in order to visit Gandhi Anand interrupted his sojourn in England where he had spent most of his time since 1925, and that in 1933 he returned to Europe where, apart from intermittent India

visits, he spent much of the next eleven years involving himself in the Spanish Civil War and other Leftist causes. Undoubtedly Anand's contact with the West has been one of the major influences in his career as a writer. As a literary figure in London during the Thirties he gained the kind of influential recognition—for example, being accorded a place by Philip Henderson in The Novel Today (1936)—which would have been denied him in India at that time. As a literary figure today Anand is the intriguing phenomenon of an apostle of the Thirties generation who, as a writer in the Sixties, is still in character with the theories of commitment and social responsibility, and with the humanistic idealism, which characterised the Thirties 'age of concern' when the first third of his novels were written.

Untouchable and Coolie were particularly in harmony with the prevailing English literary mood. They were translated into various languages and were republished by Penguin Books in 1944. Both novels display most of the characteristics of the age of concern—socio-economic crisis, a crusading Leftist spirit, an evangelism of social upheaval, humanitarianism etc. The men of the Thirties generation have been aptly described by Robin Skelton as being 'pitch-forked into a period of intense social tension in which to do their growing up';[9] this is particularly true of most modern Indian writers. Also, Skelton's description of the temper of commitment

9 Poetry of the Thirties (introduced and edited by Robin Skelton), Penguin Books, 1964, p.14.

of the Thirties writers as 'a movement of the passionate conscience' (p.36) applies equally well to the tradition of the novel which Anand brought to modern Indian writing in English and to which such novelists as K.A. Abbas, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh, S. Menon Marath and Kamala Markandaya have subsequently contributed.

Anand's decision to become a novelist sprang from a cause common among writers of the Thirties generation; it was a direct response to the condition of the West, and in his case India in particular, and also a quest for universally meaningful values which would fill the world's moral and political vacuum. This sense of urgent need which then prevailed is described in Apology for Heroism:

> ...because of the oppressive political and social authority in India and the emergence of fascism in Europe, I must believe, I must have some touch-stone of values to discriminate between the various problems before me. I must have some hypotheses. (pp.47-8)

Like many of his contemporaries, Anand found these values and hypotheses in a combination of Marxist socialism and Freudian humanism. He outstayed most of the committed writers of the time—other than those like Auden, Spender, Day Lewis, Isherwood and Rex Warner who found new directions—because being Indian he had his own cause, not someone else's, to fight for; and because for him the Thirties idealism and the vision of the brother-

hood of man survived the later period of disenchantment.

Moreover, Anand was aware of the main critical problems facing the committed writer, as he indicates in Apology for Heroism:

> ...in the Thirties social problems tended to supersede the problem of the individual in literature. The old "Fates", "God", "Evil in man" and "Nature", almost gave place to the new "Fates", "Economics" and "Politics" as they affected the "Common Man", though...the intellectual concept tended to dominate imaginative literature and made for abstractions in poetry and fiction. (p.83)

However, Anand did not always heed his artistic conscience, as is evident from the ideological abstractions of, for example, de la Havre in Two Leaves and a Bud and Dr. Shankar in Private Life of an Indian Prince.

On the other hand, when Anand wrote about the poor he was spontaneously aware of degrees of poverty which were considerably beyond the average experience, even the average imagining, of many English writers. India offered a much greater challenge than England to such Thirties criteria as 'social responsibility' and 'disinterested compassion for the mass-man'. Out of this challenge, and out of such social theories of the novel propounded by critics like Philip Henderson, the Indian sociological novel emerged.

Henderson's doctrine in The Novel Today, like Orwell's in the essay "Why I Write", is as applicable to Anand now as it was thirty years ago. Henderson

declared that 'the purpose of the most vital novel is and always has been to change mankind, and through mankind society', and that in a political age the novelist is bound to aim at political change (p.15). However, Henderson's idealisation of 'revolutionary literature' directed against the 'social order', and his view that the class-struggle is the central issue of the modern age and therefore of literature, do not comprise an adequate literary criticism for the simple reason that he attempts to define literature in terms only of a partial truth. Against such a critical background Anand's concept of 'revolutionary romanticism' seems to be a conscious attempt to make whole the partial truths of social realism and crusading radicalism.

Referring to the ending of Untouchable as a prophecy 'suggesting a choice of possibilities' (Christ, Gandhi, Marx, or the Machine), Anand implies that the writer who does not have a romantic as well as a realistic point of view will not see the whole of life and will be in danger of affirming only 'the negation of life':

> The novel of revolutionary romanticism...seeks the desire image, that is to say to suggest what the writer would like life to be like, by implication, as against what it is, in the negation of life.[11]

As this concept of romanticism—'what the writer would like life to be like'—can accommodate either moral objectivity or a propagandist proposition, the critic

11 "The Story of My Experiment With a White Lie", p.26.

of Anand's work is called upon to distinguish between the two. This is sometimes transparently easy, but often difficult. Moreover a further critical confusion arises from a theoretical contradiction in Anand himself. He writes in a social realist mode yet maintains: 'I would not consider myself a social realist because I have never professed a doctrine of that kind in literature';[12] and:

> I do not like naturalism. I have consciously, and unconsciously, written as an Indian expressionist; this expressionism is traditional with us, imaginative dramatisation...at the risk of exaggeration...The problems of machine exploitation, Victimhood, unfulfilled potentiality, are tackled in defence of innocence against the evils of the profit system of the west, in the spirit of William Morris and Ruskin and Gandhi. Romanticism is here as in Rimbaud more prophecy than acceptance—the desire image is important.[13]

This self-appraisal may be interpreted as a justifiable reaction to critics who have been suspicious of Anand's allegiances and of his long association with the West. H.H. Anniah Gowda, for example, puts the case that Anand is a propagandist whose early novels were 'calculated to appeal to the European left wing in the thirties', and that his characters accordingly are often 'exaggerated' or 'unrealistic'.[14] In this instance one must choose between Anand's 'prophecy' or 'desire image' and Gowda's claim that

12 In a letter to me dated 24th June, 1965.
13 In a letter to me dated 23rd Oct., 1965.
14 "Mulk Raj Anand", The Literary Half-Yearly Vol.VI No.1 1965, p.59.

> ...it is impossible for a genuine member of the lower classes to take the proletarian attitude, that is the rebellious attitude, which the Marxists demand. But in each of Anand's lower-depths novels the central character does take that attitude, and it does not ring true. (p.55)

Actually one of Anand's main point, as is demonstrated by the cruel social fates of various characters in Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud, is that the rebellious attitude has in fact been suffocated; hence the 'desire image'.

However, in quite rightly avoiding the all-too-common view of the committed writer as a formally-confined bigot, Anand tends to deny his reliance on realistic and naturalistic modes of expression. Formally he does rely on them to a considerable extent. But there is no good reason why his belief in human brotherhood and the goodness of man, nor his doctrine of inspiration based on a 'worship of humanity'[15] and a "limitless compassion for man, an unbounded love"[16], should be incompatible with a sociologically truthful representation of life.

Certainly there is no doubt that Anand is still a committed writer in practice, as well as theory, who still adheres to the basic procedure of the social realist novelist—that is, in taking material straight from life. The Road (1961) is a good example. The

15 In the first preface to Apology for Heroism.
16 The Big Heart, Bombay, Kutub-Popular (reprint, no date), p.142. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

story of a contemporary Indian village, The Road is an account of the crises that develop when the village Untouchables are employed on the construction of a government road. It is an allegory in miniature of the class struggle and the true hero of the novel is 'Progress'. The Untouchables are persecuted by the caste Hindus and village elders for contaminating the earth from which the stone for the road is quarried, and because they gain some measure of emancipation from their caste-ordained bondage by earning wages. However, the Untouchables' plight fires in Dhooli Singh (the village Lambardar) a powerful fraternalism, conscience and social responsibility, and he shelters and provides work for the ostracised villagers.

That The Road is a direct consequence of, and comment on, actual experiences and happenings can be deduced from the following remarks made by Anand and recorded by Dom Moraes:

"People attack me for being a Marxist. I'll tell you a story. There is a village near Khandala where the caste-families evicted forty Untouchable families who were trying to build a road. The case was put to the Central Government two years ago. Nothing has happened.

...I have bought two villages, and the Untouchables have moved into them. But I can do nothing to get the petty bureaucracy out. If I lived in England I shouldn't worry, because there the bureaucracy seems to work. Here it doesn't, and I protest, and they call me a Marxist."[17]

17 Gone Away, p.23.

Accordingly, the benefactor in the novel, Dhooli Singh, is a projection of Anand the benefactor in real life, and the author's commitment is justified by his character's humanitarianism. Thus The Road is an expression of what might be termed moral realism.

Beginning with Anand's own abstract premises, then, a reading of his novels will reveal that his 'universalist attitude' is a world-view which was partly shaped by the ideas of Gandhi, Nehru and Marx and by the Thirties' philosophy of commitment, and which is based on a humanistic approach to life, on social justice, and on the need to restore to man his natural dignity and to foster his capacity for goodness. This universalist attitude is paradoxically both grimly tragically realistic and romantically optimistic. Secondly, 'the problem of the individual' is seen to be the social economic and political degradation of the Indian common man, Anand's characterisation of whom tends to fluctuate between crude case-histories and virile portraits of the proletarian zest for life. Finally, 'the sanctions in the human centre' are defined as human prerogatives, like love and necessity which keep morality in earthly perspective and counteract retreat into fatalism or other-worldliness and similar conditioned reflexes without which, Anand believes and hopes, the upper castes could not keep the proletariat in subjection.

2 THE POOREST OF THE POOR

Explaining how he was converted to creative writing, Anand says: 'I began to dream of writing only about the poorest of the poor human beings, whom I had known'.[18] By the time Anand had published his first three novels—Untouchable, Coolie, and Two Leaves and a Bud which portray the poorest of India's poor—it was clear that his dream had been realised, and realised decisively through the application of a moral didacticism which he has defined in Apology for Heroism as

> ...the need to help raise the untouchables, the peasants, the serfs, the coolies and the other suppressed members of society, to human dignity and self-awareness in view of the abjectness, apathy and despair in which they are sunk. (p.93)

Hence the pronounced sociological emphasis in each of these novels, and the dramatic 'expressionism' (to use Anand's term) of their form whereby the central characters are conceived as negative heroes of proletarian tragedies.

Anand says of Bakha in Untouchable: 'the tragedy of my hero lay in the fact that he was never allowed to

18 "The Story of My Experiment With a White Lie", p.25.

attain anything near the potential of his qualities of manhood'.[19] This is similarly true of Munoo in Coolie, who is described in the novel as 'condemned by an iniquitous system always to remain small, abject, and drab' despite 'potentialities in his make-up';[20] and of the peasant type depicted in Two Leaves and a Bud as 'an accepting character' who collapses into 'the religion of fatalism', but is nevertheless full of 'crushed tenderness' and 'natural dignity'.[21] Collectively, Anand's first three novels comprise a comprehensive picture, starkly detailed, of the Indian proletariat of the Twenties and Thirties. How he achieves this provides the main basis of the present chapter.

Untouchable is a sound first novel and is generally regarded, quite justifiably, as one of Anand's best works. 'Of all his novels', writes K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, 'Untouchable is the most compact and artistically satisfying' 'and the most revealing and rewarding'.[22] The concrete clarity of the novel's visual pictures—the Untouchables' huts on the edge of town, the crowded dusty bazaars, alleys scattered with refuse, the regular altercations at the public well, and so on—provides a legitimate basis for Iyengar's comment that the novel offers a 'picture of a place, of a society, and of

19 ibid., p.24.
20 May Fair Books, 1962, pp.38,39. All subsequent page references are to this edition.
21 Bombay, Kutub, 1946, pp.161,244. All subsequent page references are to this edition.
22 Indian Writing in English, Asia Publishing House, 1962, p.261.

certain persons not easily to be forgotten' (p.264). A further merit is that, even though Untouchable is a didactically-intended indictment of the caste system, it is so stocked with natural responses to life that the ulterior motive is kept fairly well in control. 'Avoiding rhetoric and circumlocution', writes E.M. Forster in his Preface to the novel, 'it has gone straight to the heart of its subject and purified it' (p.v).

Untouchable encompasses a day in the life of the sweeper Bakha, who is introduced symbolically as 'a child of modern India' (p.2). Through close adherence to the dramatic unities, Anand has located Bakha firmly in a fixed reality in the hope of capturing the essence of the sweeper's existence. The one day of the action is intended to represent a fairly complete sociological experience. Although the narrative is not divided formally into parts, no doubt because Anand wanted to preserve a sense of the day's wholeness, the structure is determined by an informal Act and Scene formula.

There are four main parts of 'acts': the first introduces most of the characters and portrays life and work on a typical morning in the outcastes' colony on the outskirts of Nagar; the second, set in the town, comprises events pertaining to Bakha's 'pollution' of a rich Hindu merchant he accidentally touches; the third, set within the environs of the colony and the cantonment, expands Bakha's 'noble savage' image and

advances the course of his fluctuating fortunes; the fourth on the edge of town but the brink of the world brings Bakha into the embrace of three systems which promise him liberation—Christianity, Gandhiism and 'Marxian materialism'.

Structurally Untouchable conforms to Anand's idea of the Western story—in which 'the subtle interplay, indeed interpenetration, of situation and character... produces the climax and leads to the ultimate dénouement'—not to his idea of the Indian story in which there is little interplay'.[23] (Indeed Anand claims in "The Story of My Experiment With a White Lie" that he was influenced by the structural synthesis in Joyce's Ulysses of a single day's stream of consciousness based on pattern instead of plot.) Thus Bakha's character is revealed organically via incidents which represent most aspects of untouchability (notably scenes involving pollution and discrimination), and as a result of the composite impact these experiences make upon him his character is seen to develop along lines compatible with the author's social enlightenment.

Early in the novel Bakha is seen to exhibit with instinctive zest most of the moral-physical qualities which typify the Anand protagonist: simplicity, stamina, innocence, earnestness, ambition. Anand quite subtly establishes Bakha's special attributes of alacrity, dexterity, cleanliness, dignity and native intelligence

23 Indian Short Stories edited by Mulk Raj Anand and Iqbal Singh, New India Publishing Co., 1946, p.8.

by displaying them when they might most obviously be obscured—that is, while Bakha is working at the latrines. Bakha's innate reverence for work indicates that he is a Gandhi disciple without knowing it. Yet, even more wonderful, a kind of Lawrencian whole man nourishes his harmonious body from 'immense pent-up resources lying deep' (p.7):

> His dark face, round and solid and exquisitely well defined, lit with a queer sort of beauty. The toil of the body...seemed...to give a homogeneity, a wonderful wholeness to his body, so that you could turn round and say: 'Here is a man.' And it seemed to give him a nobility, strangely in contrast with his filthy profession and with the sub-human status to which he was condemned from birth.
>
> ...The burning flame seemed to ally itself with him. It seemed to give him a sense of power...It seemed to infuse into him a masterful instinct akin to sacrifice. (p.11)

Thus a mundane incident, the burning of dung, becomes for the novelist an almost mystical moment, a paradoxical insight into the protagonist's nature. And at this point we might be forgiven for thinking that Anand has lapsed into the kind of frothy idealisation that characterised Venkataramani's "My Little Aranulam". However, in establishing Bakha's noble image, Anand does have a thematic purpose which is suggested in the 'contrast' between 'nobility' and 'sub-human status'. First, in order to gain the reader's sympathy and to make the moral points emphatic, Anand wants the contrast between the sweeper's

inherent humanity and the degradation imposed on him to be dramatically striking. Thus the reader views the humiliations which are imposed on Bakha during the day in the light of Bakha's pre-established natural stature; as a result the human aspects of these humiliations are less likely to be overlooked.

Second, the contrast in the above scene is not merely one of stature and occupation, for the burning of excrement is in fact not the uncomplicated activity it seems; it is regarded publicly as an avowal of Bakha's uncleanliness and spiritual degradation, and as a social illustration of his moral identification with filth. So the vital contrast is really between the kind of person Bakha is and the kind of person a so-called infallible tradition says he is. The contrast, as Anand sees it beneath the surface of society, is between a human truth and a cosmic lie. Similarly, the pivotal incident in Untouchable—Bakha's touching of the Hindu merchant—is of consequence when considered within the social hierarchy and religious value-system of the Hindu tradition. This has to be appreciated if one is to grasp properly Anand's implication that the 'outrage' is neither morally nor physically an outrage but is in fact an unimportant trivial happening and should be regarded as such.

Third, the above contrast relates to Anand's theme that Untouchability is a classic example of one of life's most unhappy moral contradictions; that of character and

circumstance. Hence Anand's elaboration of the tragic and pathetic ironies inherent in the outcaste's situation is an important aspect of the theme. There is the double-edged irony that both Bakha and his sister Sohini are victims of a moral code which refuses to acknowledge socially their moral goodness. Sohini's beauty, chastity and modesty contrast with her squalid ugly environment, and she is the guiltless object of a gluttonous 'holy' man's lustful attentions.

This latter situation provides a characteristic example of the way Anand adds ironic perspective to the presentation of incident. The early morning scene at the well when Pundit Kali Nath is inflamed by Sohini's beauty is an amusing Dickensian piece of sourly-comic irony. The Pundit's reason for drawing water for the untouchables is not charitable, as would be expected: the unaccustomed exercise was designed to ease his constipation. Thus 'the peculiar contortions of his face' (p.16) are misinterpreted by the crowd as signs of spiritual meditation. So sensually satisfying is the 'stirring above his navel' and its promise of 'relief', that he can contemplate with pleasure and anticipation Sohini's 'fresh young form whose full breasts with their dark beads of nipples stood out so conspicuously under the muslin shirt'; 'he was inclined to be kind to her' (p.18). He serves Sohini first, clothing his motive in a pious utterance.

This scene also illustrates Anand's technique in

Untouchable of positioning his characters in ironic moral alignment. Thus, the Pundit's hypocritical lust contrasts not only with Sohini's innocent nature but also with the genuine love which Lachman, the Bahmin water-carrier who had come down in status, bears her. The shrewish Gulabo is in ironic alignment with the Pundit, not merely because she is antagonistic to Sohini, but also because she is the former untouchable mistress of 'a well-known Hindu gentleman'. In the later episode at the Pundit's temple, there is a discernible shift in ironic key: Sohini screams when she is molested by the breast-fondling Pundit, and he runs out among the worshippers hysterically shouting "Polluted, polluted, polluted!" Her experience serves as a leitmotif to Bakha's more complex ironic fate.

Early in the novel Bakha's character is seen to contain certain incongruities. For despite his innate nobility—his accomplishment at hockey, quick-wittedness, and smouldering compassion—he is fundamentally naive, particularly in his desire to be like a sahib. The ironic discrepancy between the mundane artificiality of Bakha's dream and the magnitude of his human self points to the confusion of values underlying Indian society. Similarly in Coolie Munoo's 'potentialities' are contrasted with 'the fatuity of his desire to be like his superiors' (p.39). Also present in Bakha's character is the pathetic incongruity of natural virility sapped by conditioned docility: this is a direct

expression of Anand's original conception of the sweeper as 'a 'noble savage', a fundamental character, whose greatness lay in his weaknesses—which appeared in his docility'.[24]

Thus the incongruity of naive aspiration and inherent nobility is a positive as well as a pathetic irony, pertaining to significant ambitions such as Bakha's desire for education. Because the Tommies treat him as a human being, he is encouraged to see himself as such and not as society has trained him to see himself. Eventually, therefore, it is in Bakha's openness to new ideas that his social salvation really lies, and this is made clear at the end of the novel when he aligns himself intellectually and morally with the poet who plans to eradicate untouchability through the use of the machine—the flush-system.

However, it is the 'catastrophe' of Bakha's pollution of the merchant which is really the main-spring of his development. This incident truly brings the suffering ego to the surface. The Hindu merchant vilely castigates Bakha who 'stood amazed', 'deaf and dumb', 'paralysed'; 'fear gripped his soul, fear and humility and servility' (p.34). Worked into a rage by the thought of having to take a purifying bath, and abetted by the protective hostility of the crowd, the merchant vociferously puts his case to the bystanders who in turn fulminate on the 'insolence' and 'uppishness' of the

24 "The Story of My Experiment With a White Lie", p.13.

untouchables. Bakha stands hands joined, head bowed, in 'futile' 'meekness'.

The grouping is stage-managed to emphasise ironic juxtaposition, with the weak cowardly Hindu towering from behind a 'moral' 'barrier' over the cowed physical bulk of the outcaste; Bakha 'realized that he was surrounded by a barrier, not a physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulders would have been enough to unbalance the skeleton-like bodies of the Hindu merchants, but a moral one' (p.35). Bakha's apologies are ignored. We are shown mob psychology in action. The crowd takes a 'sadistic delight in watching him cower' and senses through its 'vociferous members... their own awakening lust for power' (p.36). The Hindu assaults Bakha and then beats a discreetly hasty retreat.

Thus comes for Bakha the shock of recognition, of what it meant to be an untouchable; but though his soul smoulders with rage and remorse, though he perceives clearly his despair and wretchedness, though the day is to bring further humiliations which poison his natural capacity for joy, though the experience at first habituates him further to the groove of self-abasement, 'announcing his approach', the occasion has been a vital moment of self-awareness and a testing step towards maturity, releasing his mind into a turmoil of enquiry and cogitation for the rest of the book and presumably his life. 'It illuminated the inner chambers of his mind....It was all explicable now. A shock...had passed

through his perceptions, previously numb and torpid' (pp.38-9). Jack Lindsay is right when he speaks of 'the skill with which Anand interweaves his themes and shows the gradual, confused emergence in the lad's mind of a critical faculty, a scored but persisting sense of new human values'.[25]

As evidence of his new awareness, Bakha is shown developing straight away an eye for anomaly. He notices the reverential treatment accorded to an old brahminee bull, which is a repulsive social menace, and the devout touching of the bull by a pious old Hindu is in ironic juxtaposition to the preceding 'touching' scene. Moreover, despite the insult to Sohini which follows and further accusations of pollution, Bakha's capacity to dream of a better future is neither diminished nor defeated, but enlarged. In a significant passage Anand defines Bakha's status as a visionary and in so doing makes of it a parable of his own romantic vision of a new and better India:

> It was a queer mixture of awe and romance, the alternation of his hatred for his own town and the love for the world to which he looked out. Men get used to a place...and then comes a stage when the fascination of the unknown, the exotic, dominates them. It is the impulse which tries to create a new harmony, frowning upon the familiar...how pleasant men find it to look at the world with the open, hopeful, astonished eyes of the child! He didn't like his home, his street, his town, because he had been to work at the Tommies'

25 Mulk Raj Anand A Critical Essay, Bombay, Hind Kitabs, 1948, p.12.

barracks, and obtained glimpses of another world strange and beautiful; he had grown out of his native shoes into the ammunition boots that he had secured as a gift. And with this and other strange and exotic items of dress, he had built up a new world, which was commendable, if for nothing else, because it represented a change from the old ossified order and the stagnating conventions of the life to which he was born. He was a pioneer in his own way, although he had never heard of that word, and was completely unconscious that it could be applied to him. (p.62)

Here is the Indian equivalent of the American Dream. The 'impulse which tries to create a new harmony' is the humanistic vision of a new social order based on brotherly love and moral justice and is at the core of all Anand's fiction. Moreover, this vision is consistent with Bakha's humble and concrete aspirations and the 'unconscious' glimmering limits of his awareness.

However, Anand is not content to leave the dream at that. Having shown shortly afterwards that Bakha's 'love for the world' is at heart the love of the child of nature who has a mental affinity with the beautiful flower-swarming slopes of the Bulashah Hills, Anand is over-theoretical and unconvincing in analysing Bakha's 'discord between person and circumstance' (p.76) in a language of naturalistic philosophising. Although Bakha has been shown 'startled into an awareness of the mystery of vegetable moods', the knowledge we are led to believe Bakha possesses naturally is naturalistically denied him:

...though he had the receptivity of the man who is willing to lend his senses to experience, he had an unenlightened will. Necessity had forced him to the contemplation of the charms of nature, merely superficially. Heredity had furrowed no deep grooves in his soul where flowers could grow...The cumulative influence of careful selection had imprisoned his free will...He could not reach out from the narrow and limited personality he had inherited to his larger yearning....His wealth of unconscious experience, however, was extraordinary....But it wanted the force and vivacity of thought to transmute his vague sense into the superior instinct of the really civilized man. (pp.76-7)

There seems to be some confusion existing between the pseudo-Lawrencian attitudinising of the man-nature relationship, popular in English fiction at the time, and Bakha's failure to measure up to a shifting or finally obscure set of deterministic values. E.M. Forster's point in the Preface that 'the fact that he [Anand] has come to fiction through philosophy has given him depth' (p.vi) seems to break down at this stage. It is also noticeable that Anand's otherwise adequate and virile language, conveying the sight smell sound taste and heat of India, is here stilted, conventional and cliché-ridden.

Nevertheless, the last 'act' of the novel is theroetically redeeming and concretely shows Bakha in his new, though still perplexed and untutored, freedom as an inquiring spirit. Nor is Bakha unrealistically transformed from an impishly good person into an

allegorical symbol of virtue, as the funny caricature scene of his meeting with the Salvation Army Colonel testifies. Bakha is intrigued when he is told that Jesus did not recognise caste and died for all men, including and especially untouchables, but is disheartened to learn that Jesus will recognise him for his sins rather than as a victim who is sinned against. However, he follows Colonel Hutchinson to his church in the hope of getting a pair of sahib trousers, but is put to flight by the fearsome appearance and un-Christian hostility of the Colonel's embittered wife.

Then at the Gandhi rally Bakha is thunderstruck by the Mahatma's compassionate recognition of the Untouchable's spiritual simplicity and Gandhi's statement that soul-pollution cannot result from work because all labour is ennobling. Next Bakha is impressed by the young poet who reveres Gandhi as "the greatest liberating force of our age" (p.128), but suggests that India "has suffered for not accepting the machine". The poet's vision of the future is inspired by 'the impulse which tries to create a new harmony' and is a 'dynamism' based on four propositions: that Indians have a "genius to accept things" (p.129); that their six-thousand year-old "race consciousness" enables them to see life whole and know its "secret flow" (p.130); that all men are essentially equal; and that the machine will help to eradicate untouchability. Thus the novel ends with intimations of a new enlightenment

and Bakha decides to return home and tell his father all that he has learnt.

In writing Untouchable Anand clearly made use of a number of important techniques of realism and naturalism. Among these are: the use of the case-history method, sociological documentation, and a pungent life-like speech; an emphasis on heredity and environment; the advocacy of a thesis for social reform; the arrival of moral values from social premises; preoccupation with the power and ethic of the machine; the introduction of an historical figure (Gandhi) as a character in the action; and the use of an intellectual commentator to conclude the action and advance an attitude. In these respects Untouchable is an identifiable product of the Thirties. It is also a valuable contribution to the development of the Indian novel in English as well as a useful introduction to Anand's work.

Anand's second novel, Coolie, is more ambitious and diffuse than his first. Sociological concern in Coolie is no longer primarily limited to caste, and the general issues of poverty, exploitation, social and economic parasitism, and moral corruption are presented in more representative contexts. Certainly the main character, Munoo, has much in common with Bakha: suffering, sensitivity, humiliation, frustrated selfhood, animal vitality, native intelligence. Descriptions of Munoo's

'irrepressible impetuosity of life itself' and 'unconscious life-force' (p.59) apply equally well to Bakha. However, their destinies are different, because the didactically hopeful conclusion of Untouchable is replaced in Coolie by a 'tragic' ending. Whereas catastrophe for Bakha has an aftermath of enlightenment and the vision of a new order, catastrophe for Munoo is a series of personal disasters, punctuated by moments of tragic illumination, and leading to inevitable doom.

Although the story is told from an omniscient point of view, mainly so that Anand can make value judgements concerning a wide range of people and sociological material, the story is projected mainly from Munoo's angle. The narrative is restricted to a period of little more than a year—it begins when Munoo is fourteen and ends with his death in his sixteenth year—in order to stress the proletarian tragedy of premature 'life negation'.

In the course of the narrative Munoo represents specific phases of proletarian existence in specific settings; in this manner Anand invests him with sociological significance, and organises the action in a structurally meaningful way. Coolie is divided into five chapters: the first, and only short, chapter portrays Munoo, the orphan of dispossessed peasants, as an innocent natural lad in the rural village of Bilaspur in the Kangra Hills; the second deals with

his cruel term as a virtual slave in the household of Babu Nathoo Ram in Sham Nagar, a town on the plain below the Hills; the third recounts his experiences in the feudal city of Daulatpur as a worker in a small pickle factory and as a coolie fighting for work in the city market; the fourth describes his life as a labourer in Bombay at the British-owned Sir George White Cotton Mills; and the fifth shows him as a servant and rickshaw coolie in the employ of a promiscuous Eurasian, Mrs. Mainwaring, in Simla. Such a pattern is indicative of the author's desire both to exploit the Indian scene for panoramic background and to give his story verisimilitude.

It is possible that in determining the structure of Coolie Anand had in mind the divisions of the five-act tragedy. Although the protagonist is an Innocent and Victim who neither perpetrates his own downfall nor carries with him a corroding guilt, within the five-act pattern Munoo's life—however brightened by transitory moments of better fortune or his zest for life—follows a cyclic course of tragic inevitability, beginning with his departure from the hills and ending with his return to them. The concept of fate governing the action is a naturalistic variant of the classical idea of inevitability, for the episodes are linked by a deterministic pattern within a framework, not of supranatural morality, but of heredity, biology and environment.

Running parallel with this naturalistic scheme are themes of exploitation, victimhood, thwarted innocence,

and unfulfilled potentiality; the motif of a descent into hell, and an atmosphere of doom. A chronological examination of the narrative reveals how insistent this pattern is.

Munoo's beginning, Anand suggests, is characteristic of the underprivileged classes. His parents were ruined by ruthless landlord and usury systems and all Munoo has inherited from them is their victimhood and the memory of his mother's 'tragic dignity and utter resignation' (p.7). Clearly man, not nature, is to blame, for amid the lavish beauty of the hills setting Munoo is naturally joyous and innocent. Original sin is sociological. So is the Fall.

In chapter two Munoo descends to the plain. He is thrown out of paradise by his bullying uncle who puts him into the service of Nathoo Ram and appropriates his wages; in turn Munoo is exploited and maltreated by the babu and his tormagant wife. The grimness of his experience in this household is starkly depicted in telling scenes, like that in which Munoo is discovered, panic-stricken and shamed, defecating against the back wall because he had not been told where the lavatory was. They stay in the memory; vivid, claiming sympathy. However, it is not long before Munoo is over-obtrusively and unnecessarily burdened by his author's thesis:

> His ego, conditioned by the laws and customs of the society in which he had been born, the society whose castes and classes and forms had been determined by the self-seeking of the few, of the powerful, sought all

the prizes of wealth, power and possession exactly as his superiors sought them....

But the stories of his ancestors...his country...had all been records of the desire for power, the desire for property and the desire for honour of a few chosen men.... he had been blinded by the glamour of greatness...into forgetting that he was condemned by an iniquitous system always to remain small, abject, and drab.

The biological expedient, however, which made him want to live, was forcing the multi-coloured cells in his body to reach out instinctively...even for a breath of the foul air in his master's dingy little kitchen...He was vaguely aware of the need of love...But he was as yet essentially an ineffectual 'pawn on the chessboard of destiny'...and he was to remain a slave until he should come to recognize his instincts. (pp.38-9)

Here, in intellectually turgid prose, we are given within the framework of inevitability and exploitation of a typical naturalistic picture of the small drab person or ego: an abject victim driven by biological expedient, conditioned by social environment, condemned by an iniquitous system and the powerful few, blinded by the values of an immoral and false materialism yet helplessly striving in the face of a deterministic destiny to discover love through a recognition of his true instincts! Whichever way you re-write or concentrate the message it remains an abstract pastiche; life reduced to lecture notes.

Soon Munoo is beaten to the point of rebellion and runs away. He hides under the seat of a train—this is described with meaningful prognostication as a 'descent into this inferno'—and finds himself bound for Daulatpur. There he is employed in a pickle factory by the kindly

Seth Prabha Dyal and his unscrupulous partner Ganpat. However, despite Munoo's elevation to the loving status of son in the Seth's childless household, chapter three is a further descent into the inferno.

The factory setting is Zolaist and intentionally symbolic: 'he descended into the inferno of the factory' (p.93). Situated at the end of Cat Killers' Lane, 'a narrow, sordid little gully chock full of rubbish which festered in the shade by the congested gutters' (p.69), the factory is 'sunk like a pit into the bowels of the earth' (p.71). 'It seemed the winds of the heavens never visited this world' (p.72), this 'dark underworld, full of the intense heat of blazing furnaces and the dense malodorous smells...dust and ashes' (p.94). One senses through this unambiguous imagery of death and damnation, and through the steam and stench of decayed fruit, that here is the paradisal world gone awry, and this impression is reinforced by the reptilean undertones; by the references to 'a monstrous python with a flowing beard...two snakes which had apparently died quarrelling.... a reptile with a mouth at each end' (p.95).

In such a setting Ganpat can be readily accepted as a kind of Satanic figure, a cruel fiend significantly referred to on most occasions as 'the goat face'. We are given a two-pronged sociological explanation of his evil; he was born rich but ejected from his class. The allegorical innuendo might seem blasphemous to a

devout Christian:

> Ganpat was a rich man's son, born and bred in the lap of luxury, with a grievance against fate because his Father had gambled away his fortune on the stock exchange... he had cultivated a tough skin and a bullying manner which...had developed into instruments of personal hate and a perverse selfishness....The hate that gleamed from his bloodshot eyes made him loathsome to look at, demonish and malevolent (p.93).

It is no time before the familiar exploiter-exploitee pattern emerges: the worthless licentious Ganpat defrauds the firm, ruins Prabha, and appropriates Prabha's business contacts, while his honest devout innocent victim is preyed upon by creditors and brutally beaten by the police. Cat Killers' Lane itself is a peripheral symbol of exploitation, of the greed of landlords and usurers. Thus Prabha's catastrophe (and consequently Munoo's) has been prepared for naturalistically on the basis of character (Ganpat's corrupt nature), action (Ganpat's embezzelment), symbol (the internal setting), and by such authorial hints as 'For the most part men realize themselves through the force of external necessity' (p.92).

The denizen workers in the factory, particularly the old 'grey-haired, bent and dim-eyed' woman (p.81), and Maharaj and Bonga, 'the elephantine idiot and the deaf and dumb coolie' (p.78), are reminiscent of Zola's primitivistic portraits. Maharaj and Bonga represent underworld deformity not in moral terms but as examples of nature's

victimhood; blighted and grotesque, they provide some of the most effective pathos in the novel. There are moments, such as Ganpat's early morning beating of the sleep-sodden 'gross mass' of Maharaj, when Anand arouses a kind of disturbing Dickensian pity.

With the collapse of Prabha's establishment Munoo once more experiences the Darwinian struggle for survival at the primal level: this time as a coolie in the city market. He soon develops certain Darwinian traits, particularly low cunning; he would secure work, for example, by spreading the rumour that the market was to be closed. There are also new elaborations of the exploitation theme. Using Munoo as a focus, Anand describes the various injustices which the social system perpetrates upon the poor. One particular adventure illustrates a special kind of hypocritical exploitation. At one stage Munoo's admiration for Prabha's devoutness and humility, and the promise of free food at the temple, prompt Munoo to lead a spiritual life; however, this desire is quickly extinguished when he meets the holy man of the 'tall phallic temple'. Munoo discovers that the holy man is a voluptuary who achieves through personal intervention the birth of 'sons of gods' to the childless wives of the merchant class.

Munoo sleeps in the open in the city's compounds, and Anand's calculated descriptions of the night naturalistically emphasise foreboding, squalor, and

cosmic pessimism. The night is oppressive; full of animal howlings, consumptive coughing, the smell of rotten grain, cow-dung, urine and foul breath. The sleepless coolies moaning to their gods provoke in Munoo an unkindly feeling 'towards the Infinite after having seen the devout Prabha suffer' (p.120). The motif of cosmic hostility and duplicity is suggested by the dagger image of the moon stabbing the sky's side and shedding 'drops of white-blooded stars'; 'There was no meaning in the sky beyond that' (p.121). In this setting Munoo emerges as a typical realist protagonist in his limited, perturbed and frustrated awareness. He asks himself what the 'separate thing' is that exists under his skin apart from the 'things' in his head. 'But the problems seemed insoluble....and the minute images in the corner of his soul broke up into even more microscopic elements, till they sank into the complete emptiness from which they had emerged' (p.127). Munoo, then, is essentially part of the general vision of dissolution. Later, on two important occasions, oceanic images implicate Munoo in the cosmic anarchy. In escaping from terrifying communal massacres in Bombay, he hides near the shore where 'the vast sheet of water... swished like a snake and spilled the white foam of its poison on the shores of India....The anarchy of the ocean drowned him in sleep' (p.247). The image is recalled, with respect to Munoo's death, in the closing sentence

of the novel: 'But in the early hours of one unreal white night he passed away—the tide of his life having reached back to the deeps' (p.280). In these images, as in the racial content of the novel, 'white' paradoxically has sinister and dark associations.

Chapter four begins with Munoo's two thousand mile journey under a 'merciless' 'malevolent' sun to Bombay where he feels 'completely insignificant and small' (p.156). Munoo meets the peasant Hari and his family and accompanies them to the cotton mills. The poverty and suffering in the city streets is indicative of what is to come: a further descent into hell. The mills are an 'inferno', a 'waste land', which breeds a 'dried up, shrivelled, flat-footed, hollow-chested, hollow-cheeked, hollow-eyed' race of men (p.231). The fifteen-by-ten room in which Munoo lives with eight other people is a 'hell'. By the end of the chapter society has become 'bedlam' and the waste land 'the valley of the shadow of death' (p.243).

The mills are intended to symbolise the degrading domination and exploitation of the Indian proletariat by British imperialism. The labourers, including wives and children, work an eleven-hour day; factory conditions are barbaric, facilities and wages quite inadequate. Sir Reginald White, President of the Company, the English foreman, and the Pathan guards are ruthless parasites.

At this point in the narrative Anand invests the

Machine with symbolic and thematic significance, drawing upon most of its literary attributes in the realist novel. Munoo's earlier manifestations of wonder at the machine—his excitement at hearing a gramophone and seeing a 'steel bird'—are succeeded by terrifying and sinister experiences in industry. The ethical ambivalence of the machine becomes fully apparent: the machine's potential for the promotion of the common good, as envisaged by Munoo, has been perverted by the self-interest of the powerful few. The machine is the demon of the industrial inferno; man is its slave not its master. The theme is conventional but Anand exploits it with telling effect.

Through the Machine symbolism Anand reinforces the idea of man as a trapped animal living in the shadow of death: the machine 'casts a black shadow, strangling one at the throat with its powerful, invisible fingers' (p.188). Mrs. Mainwaring's car runs over Munoo, and in the final chapter the machine reappears as a nineteenth-century contrivance and grotesque symbol of human enslavement: the rickshaw invented by the Rev. J. Fordyce for the conveyance of his congregation to and from church.[25]

25 A number of Anand's short stories illustrate his moral concern with regard to the place and role of the machine in a traditional society. "The Cobbler and the Machine" (in The Barber's Trade Union), for example, is a Tolstoyan lament for an old village cobbler who is persuaded by an enthusiastic progressive-minded boy to abandon his old-fashioned handcraft methods and buy a sewing machine. However, the machine proves to be the instrument of the cobbler's death: he is consumed by it in his frantic effort to pay for it.

After the earlier socio-economic ravages, the final chapter of Coolie is a more tranquil drift towards death. Munoo is 'mentally and physically broken....sad and bitter and defeated, like an old man' (p.254). His return to the hills is ironical. Simla is a paradise only for the British and the rich; for the coolies it is yet another realm of slavery. Anand thus contrives to terminate his theme of exploitation in a setting that typifies the parasitism of the 'Empire-builders'. In a dirge-like movement, Coolie ends with Munoo's death as a result, medically, of consumption and, naturalistically, of the ills of society. It is the conventional 'tragic' ending of the naturalistic novel; the life-principle is wiped out. Death completes the hero's victimhood.

Anand also chooses to end the novel with a message, and for this purpose he introduces a somewhat improbable alter-ego figure: the high-born English-educated Mohan who is a coolie for a complex of reasons—to become a man among men, to escape the sarkar, and to promote the revolution. To the dispossessed coolies Mohan says: "come with me and we shall kill the landlord one day, and get your land" (p.280). The dying Munoo clutches Mohan's hand. This novelistic gesture is presumably intended to show the victim of the past grasping a potentially regenerate future. The introduction of Mohan specifically as a commentator is a didactic device Anand made more extensive use of in his next novel, Two Leaves and a Bud.

Untouchable and Coolie demonstrate an early tendancy in Anand to present life in terms of a proletarian experience and a commentary on that experience, and these two aspects tend to be artificially separated at certain points of authorial intrusion or didactic characterisation because of the intellectual limitations of the central character. In Two Leaves and a Bud these divisions are even more marked in that the commentator is elevated to the status of major character (Dr. John de la Havre) who is also well qualified intellectually to deputise for the author; thus, while the peasants on the plantation (particularly Gangu and his family) do most of the experiencing of life, especially suffering, de la Havre does most of the theorising. In Two Leaves and a Bud Anand also breaks new ground in choosing an an Assamese setting, in extending the range of his characterisation by depicting the British in India, and in looking more closely at the question of Indo-British relationships and British rule. The plot interrelates various themes, particularly the dehumanisation of the Indian under British rule, the morally-vacuous insularity of the British community, and the need for an enlightened scientific consciousness and a revolutionary humanitarianism founded on Marxian economics as a basis for a politically independent India which will uphold the human dignity of all individuals. In making his social critic in the novel a white (de la Havre) who diverges from British policy and behaviour patterns, Anand attempts

to give his own value judgements an air of objectivity.

The action of Two Leaves and a Bud degenerates from an evocative dramatisation of peasant life into a melodramatic class-conflict. At the beginning of the novel Gangu is lured to the tea plantation with false promises that working and housing conditions are ideal and that he will soon be able to acquire his own land. However, his dream of an honourable peasantry fulfilled through the dignity of labour is soon shattered. The workers are actually indentured coolies deprived of fundamental freedoms and subjected to a vigorous militaristic organisation. They are overworked underpaid victims of graft, usury and extortion, ruthlessly exploited by Indian foremen and the assistant manager, Reggie Hunt. Their huts are primitive and their colony is insanitary. Gangu's wife, Sajani, dies of cholera following de la Havre's unsuccessful appeals to the company to provide adequate facilities and implement measures for the prevention of disease. Following a vicious show of force in which Hunt scatters a group of coolies, the labourers stage a peaceful demonstration and are encouraged by de la Havre to petition for better conditions. However, this genuine proletarian mission is misinterpreted as an uprising and the army is flown in to put down the so-called insurrection. De la Havre is dismissed. Reggie Hunt, unbalanced by a power complex, sex and the climate, becomes passionately

interested in Gangu's daughter, Leila; she escapes from his clutches into her hut where he is confronted by Gangu whom he kills in a fit of panic and frustration. The novel ends with Hunt's acquittal by a predominantly European jury.

Reggie Hunt is a melodramatic villain with perhaps some valid, though heavy-handed, sociological significance, but as a supposedly morally-relevant portrayal of evil he is quite unconvincing. One can appreciate, of course, that Reggie is presented as a misanthropic product of the Empire-building ethos, of the myth of 'British greatness' fostered by the public school spirit and the colonial administration; that he has become obsessed with the power which accrues to him as a 'dominant white'; that his bullying and brutality are inverted symptoms of a deep-seated fear of India and of failure; that his alienation from India and his neurotic aggressiveness are conducive to the release of his base passions, especially lust, in contradiction to the British code. All this is clear enough and related unambiguously to the novel's social theme, but the fact remains that Reggie is a crude creation. Animal drives, lust for power, physiological egoism, brutal sexual desire: one is conscious of the stilted naturalistic stereotype. Equally forced and raw is Anand's belated revelation that Reggie's background—a promiscuous mother, a hateful stepmother, loneliness at school—explains his disgust

and hatred for India and humanity in general. It is in keeping with the whole tenor of the characterisation that his failure to accept, and therefore control, India in any real sense, is demonstrated in a cliché-symbol: Reggie's panicky and wrathful inability to control his horse both on the polo field and during a monsoonal storm.

Anand fares better with de la Havre, through whom he wishes to articulate more fully the philosophy of brotherhood and revolution which Mohan advanced in Coolie and the poet advanced in Untouchable, and, at the same time, to test and examine this philosophy in the life situation. Thus de la Havre's brooding sensitivity and intellectual anguish, his inexpedient attempt to rally the coolies, his sacrifice of personal happiness, are indicative of the suffering and failure attendant upon the putting into practice of a philosophy of human betterment. The result is that the novel contains a secondary level of action which is intellectual and which complements the primary dramatic level of the action.

Early in the novel when de la Havre is introduced contemplating the infinitesimal cells that mirror 'destruction' with 'fascinating beauty', his thoughts of death and his scientific reflections turn more succinctly and clearly upon the naturalistic argument which had been asserted in Coolie and Untouchable:

...all chemical disintegration was inherent in nature, he reflected in rather a depressed vein. All the processes of change, colouring and unification were complementary to chemical decomposition. All that was true of nature was true of society. Social development also as a complicated process of action and reaction, of separation and systematization, in so far as an individual existed only in his relation to the community, in so far as he was the product of the climate in which he was born and reared, of the customs of the society in which he grew up, of habit and chance, of heredity and of all the transformations in the atmosphere in and through which he lived and flowed into the lives of other human beings. (p.14)

Anand constructs his situations, characters, and value judgements largely according to the above formula.

John de la Havre's journal, a device whereby Anand gets into the novel most of the sociological data and opinion on which his view of life is based, is an interesting documentation of some of the intellectual crises—particularly dismay at society's moral impotence—which have plagued the modern mind. Can de la Havre's programme of sympathy in human relations and a simple Marxist humanitarianism deal with the problem of India? With this kind of question Anand tests his own belief, fully realising how formidable the problem is in actuality: for India is "an old civilization in decay" (p.114); a country where "the sordid side of tragic existence" (p.115) is all too evident and "fate had...conspired with the seasons to obliterate everything capriciously" (p.116); a country retarded by a poor education system and a narrow

professional vision where people are reduced to "economic slavery" and where their "chance of justice and redress are chimerical" (p.118). Even if this picture of India in the Thirties is one-sided or exaggerated, it plainly contains elements of truth.

As Anand speaks through and with de la Havre most of the time, it is not surprising that Two Leaves and a Bud contains view-points and a reaching out for a humanist belief in the whole man which have close parallels in Apology for Heroism—'The book of mine', Anand says, 'which will give you my considered attitudes'.[26] For instance, compare de la Havre's contemplation of the cells quoted earlier with the following passages from Apology for Heroism in which Anand, like de la Havre, attempts to justify Marx with scientific premises:

...admit the fact of the transformation of energy, the organic cell and evolution, and then the Marxian hypothesis makes things fairly easy to understand.(p.64)

For, if reality be material, evolutionary and incomplete; if man and the mind of man be the products of this reality; if there be a constant interaction between the mind and the reality of which it forms a part, resulting in knowledge; if, further, this knowledge be achieved through action; and if, finally, ever new aspects of reality be always brought within the range of human action and human knowledge, then the range of knowledge inevitable to the socio-historical process is limitless and the fallibility of man an indubitable fact. (p.72)

26 In the letter to me dated 24th June, 1965.

On the basis of this comparison one can appreciate that the combination of contentiousness and moral passion in de la Havre's character comes directly from Anand. The main danger of this mind transplant is that 'life' tends to be lost in the process.

Generally speaking Two Leaves and a Bud fails to integrate philosophy and drama in an artistically satisfying way. This discrepancy is also reflected in the style which varies from pretentious rhetoric to deft satire and caricature, from platitudinous polemic to stark crisp simplicity. However these structural and stylistic inconsistencies should not be confused with the principle of variance or dialectic that is an integral aspect of the novel's meaning and vision of life. As we have seen from de la Havre's scientific cogitations, Anand sees life as a process evolving ambivalences, and permutations of nature, society and man; the cells mirror both destruction and beauty of order.

The description of Assam in the opening chapter sets a symbolic tone suggestive of variance and discord. The jungle is both a 'nether-world' where the 'two-horned Yama, the God of Death,' towers 'supreme' (p.2) and a paradise of 'elysian fields'—'the heaven that is promised to the righteous after their purity of heart has been tried through the tortures of hell' (p.11). However, the disenchanting gulf between the imagined

promised land and cruel reality is soon apparent. The river that runs through the plantation is not only a river of 'immortality', a 'creative force' bearing 'the burdens of existence on its breast'; it is also a river of Indian sorrows 'latent' with 'annihilation' (p.232). Moreover, the old communal harmony of the peasant in his pristine relationship with nature, when he knew the 'meaning' of 'toil', has been degraded into the slavery and parasitism of an iniquitous political and economic system.

The dramatic grouping of the characters is a dialectical protagonist-antagonist illustration of humanity-inhumanity discord. The characters are portrayed in elemental opposition with one or another of such fundamentals as life, death, fate, man, society, nature. Probably the most eye-catching symbol of this opposition is Leila's struggle to the death with a python which surprises her while she is looking for a flower; she is caught in a 'terrible embrace' with the 'messenger of death'. The Shakespearian echo notwithstanding, the python is a manifestation of the powers of anti-human darkness, and the scene is probably also intended as an anticipatory image of Hunt's later attempt to violate Leila. The girl, by contrast, is identified with natural goodness, beauty, purity and innocence through her association with flowers, which she picks with 'religious scrupulosity'.

The principle of variance, then, is inherent in the relationship of British and Indian, Indian and Indian, rich and poor, in human nature, and in such human dualities as love and hate, good and evil, philanthropy and exploitation. Ultimately, of course, all the variance of life lies traditionally within the cosmic shadows of Hinduism 'where the good and evil of fortune seemed the equally just retributions of an inevitable, inexorable fate, imposed by the Omnipotent, Omniscient Providence, of whom Siva and Vishnu and Krishna were the supreme incarnations' (p.244). However, while Anand relates the accepting character of the peasant to this cosmic framework, acceptance and fatalism are attitudes which he regards as detrimental to a proper humanistic revolution. Although Two Leaves and a Bud is a dark novel, it is not without hope. There is hope, Anand implies, while there are people like de la Havre to pit their moral strength against the social forces of darkness. There is hope also in the peasant integrity of character which Ganga typifies: though fearing 'the violent play of God' he is yet 'purged of his fear of the inevitable' (p.234); though stifled and maltreated he possesses the 'innermost instinct' of forgiveness. And there is hope in the ultimate triumph of human understanding. On the other hand, the novel's humanistic philosophy is more akin to invective than a realised vision, and the novel's moral vigour is reflected more in passionate protest than

artistic implication.

Taken together Untouchable, Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud indicate that in the Thirties Anand was developing a conception of the Indian novel as an essentially proletarian work. This conception bears a striking resemblance to some of the theoretical notions of proletarian art which were fashionable at the time. Anand's realism, for example, tended to be an approach to art based upon the imposition of doctrinal assumption upon reality; this is comparable to Christopher Caudwell's formulation of a communist rationale of the nature of art based on dialectical materialism. Caudwell's theory is summed up in the following extracts from Illusion and Reality (1937):

> The full understanding of this mutual inter-penetration or reflexive movement of men and Nature, mediated by the necessary and developing relations known as society, is the recognition of necessity, not only in Nature but in ourselves and therefore also in society. Viewed objectively this active subject-object relation is science, viewed subjectively it is art; but as consciousness emerging in active union with practice it is simply concrete living...
>
> Proletarian art in realising itself will become communist art.
>
> This process is simply a parallel in the sphere of ideology to what will take place in the sphere of material economy.[27]

A similar rationale underlies the conception of

27 Lawrence & Wishart, 1947, pp.279,282.

Coolie, which might be described as 'proletarian art' which attempts to identify theory and life on the basis of the Marxist dialectic. The necessitarian argument determines the novel's action, 'the subject-object relation' as 'science' is evident in Anand's ambivalent obsession with the Machine, the relation in 'art' as a synthesis of 'ideology' and a revolutionised 'material economy' appears in the novel's arrangement of values, and the 'consciousness' of the relation as 'simply concrete living' defines Munoo's aspiration.

Thus moral awareness in Coolie results largely from an identification of good and evil with socio-economic categories. In Sham Nagar Munoo discovers for himself the Marxist dualism that "there must only be two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor" (p.159). Later in Bombay Munoo is inspired when he hears the Communist Sauda declare: "There are only two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor", and—such is Anand's integral consciousness of the theme—Munoo remembers that 'at Sham Nagar, he too had similar thoughts' (p.236).

Reflecting on the contrary natures and fates of Prabha and Ganpat, Munoo asks himself: "Why...are some men so good and others bad...? (p.150). The answer to this is suggested by the novel's dialectic moral arrangement on the basis of the two conflicting socio-economic groups and the contrast between the innate unspoiled

values of the peasantry and the power principles of the exploiting class. Such an opposition determines much of the action in Coolie and results in the presentation of character in terms of ideological alignment. Thus the good characters display essentially-peasant values of the heart as defined by Anand—spontaneity, zest, humour, love, humility, dignity, courage, modesty, frankness—while the bad characters possess vices of the social parasite and calculating mind—greed, ambition, hatred, brutality, pride, egoism, snobbery, self-interest, duplicity. The latter group, of course, is politically and economically ascendant, and through social pressure perverts the natural 'life-force' of the peasant, diverting it into self-pity, servility, self-abasement, humiliation and fatalism; while those who aspire to the bourgeois dream are shown to be sycophantic, dishonest, licentious, vulgar, dehumanised, tyrannical and sordid.

The opposition between sordid parasite and noble peasant in a dramatic conflict-situation recurs throughout Coolie. However, the schematisation of values and people according to the Marxist dialectic is not as transparent as the above comments might misleadingly suggest. For instance there are exceptions and inversions: Nathoo Ram's brother, Dr. Prem Chand, is kindly, warm and considerate, especially towards

Munoo; Nathoo's wife has forsaken her peasant heritage; Mohan has deserted his class and finds his identity among humble and poor people. Moreover, Anand's early novels are not wholly propagandist works calculated to stir calculable feelings. They do contain social observation for its own sake; and Anand was aiming at a composite social picture to which each novel was supposed to contribute a new dimension.

Of all his works, probably the fourth—the novella Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts—makes the least significant contribution to this picture. It is a deathbed piece in which Anand attempts to show, through the premature demise of the student Nur, the tragic vulnerability of Indian youth because of a defective economic system and the failure of the older generation to understand the younger. Anand does not want his readers to forget that at the top and of the educational scale there are also Munoos and Bakhas: victims of an irresponsible society.

3 THE TRILOGY AS EPIC

Commenting on Mulk Raj Anand's trilogy—The Village (1939), Across the Black Waters (1940), The Sword and the Sickle (1942)—Jack Lindsay remarks:

> He has re-discovered the Indian epical tale in terms of the contemporary struggle. All the while, a continual fusion is going on between the methods of Chatterjee, Tagore, Premchand and the methods which Anand has learned from his study of the European novel; and the result is one long experiment in adapting the Indian folk elements to Western eyes and the European elements ti Indian eyes. In stabilizing and extending the Indian novel, Anand is also adding to the tradition of the European novel.[28]

These comments provide a useful basis for a detailed critical examination of the trilogy, particularly as the epic conception underlying the composite structure of The Village, Across the Black Waters and The Sword and the Sickle is of primary interest to the reader and is indispensable to an understanding of how Anand's preoccupations are expressed through the narrative structure.

The trilogy's epic dimension is first of all

28 Mulk Raj Anand, p.25.

apparent in the scales of time, place and event which Anand has chosen as a framework for the story. Epically, the story is of the 'birth of a nation' variety; heroically, it demonstrates through the central character, Lal Singh, that the man of destiny in the emergence of a free and independent India is the intelligent common man.

The Village describes rural life in the Punjab in the pre-1914 decade and traces Lal Singh's growth from childhood to adolescence. Using the village of Nandpur as a crystallising point, Anand delves into history. He shows the impingement of industrialisation on the old order; the decline of the peasantry as a self-sufficient class as a result of economic anarchy; the persistence of retarding features of the old way of life—for example, poverty, ignorance, superstition and mores which have passed from immemoriality into decadence and obsolescence. On the narrative level, Lal Singh grows into a rebel sensitive to social injustice. His conflict with communal authoritarianism—he renounces his Sikhood by having his hair cut—symbolises the germinal tensions of the age. Dramatically, this conflict reaches a climax when Lalu is falsely accused of theft by the landlord after he has been caught playing with the landlord's daughter, Maya. He escapes imprisonment by running away and joining the army. Not long afterwards Lalu's eldest

brother, Sharm Singh, in a moment of moral outrage, kills the landlord's wastrel son because he had seduced Sharm Singh's wife. Sharm Singh is hanged. This family tragedy cripples Lalu's father who dies on the eve of Lalu's departure for France. Through this dramatic situation Anand engineers a forceful indictment of anachronistic feudalism, a corrupt landlord system, and the moral anarchy which is a consequence of both.

Across the Black Waters, set in France, is a World War I novel with a difference: for the war is seen not through European eyes but from the point of view of various Indian sepoys (Lal Singh primarily) who fought in the trenches. Lalu's experiences are described against the epic background of a dying agonised world and an international background of French British Indian and even German relationships, which are tinged with an unusual intimacy through the vagaries of war. Lalu experiences two kinds of war: the official war, and a war within war involving conflicts inherent in human nature and among individuals. Both 'wars' continually explode with dramatic moments, but Anand succeeds in the difficult task he set himself of maintaining thematic perspective in rendering incident. The action continually exemplifies the theme of man's victimhood and his complementary capacity for an heroic Promethean fortitude and moral courage, and does

this properly in terms of life as it is seen to be experienced. The death of many of the 'good' characters and Lalu's survival at the end of Across the Black Waters comprise an undying assertion of man's dignity and integrity, a meaning in suffering.

The Sword and the Sickle is the most massive of the three novels and the most diversely eventful, embracing national, local and personal issues and happenings. In the course of the action Lal Singh seems to traverse the breadth and width of Northern India. The background to the novel is, of course, post-war India when the Gandhian movement and the independence struggle were coming to occupy the central place in the dynamic of contemporary Indian history. It is what Anand has described in Letters on India as the 'second phase of the struggle':

> The second phase of the struggle began with the world war of 1914-18, and was heightened by the influence of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and by the aftermath of war in Western Europe....the spectacle of the arrogant Western imperialisms fighting against each other, destroyed the notion of the white man's inherent superiority over the "lesser breeds without the law", and it filled the subject peoples with the will to work out their own destinies. The fact that India had emerged as one of the main sources of the Empire's man power, supplies and money, gave the country a claim to speak for itself.[29]

This historical point of view provides the main

29 Routledge, 1942, p.123.

links between the second and third books in the trilogy as Anand was likely to have seen them; it neatly explains why Anand devoted the whole of the second book to Lal Singh's involvement in World War I and why his picture of chaotic Europe is relevant to The Sword and the Sickle. Indeed, as the Lal Singh of the third book becomes an increasingly confident man-of-the world spokesman he makes frequent references to his war experiences in order to demonstrate that an understanding of the historical interconnections between Europe and India must make Indians more revolutionary-conscious.

Lalu's return to India is a journey into post-war nightmare through a land of poverty, dispossessed peasant, over-crowded towns, blighted villages, despoiled rural economies, industrial depravity, class conflict, violence, police corruption and brutality, bloated landlordism, and Government tyranny. Lalu observes that the rich and powerful have got richer and more powerful, while the poor and the enslaved have become poorer and more enslaved. On the other hand, he senses within the changes about him a vague kind of dialectical necessity, and he sees the need for a new social direction while being unsure of the objective and the means of reaching it. However, after considerable tautological discussion and a certain amount of misplaced enthusiasm, the objective turns out to be Revolution and the means Marxist, humanist, mechanistic and non-violent. Lalu throbs with compassion for the

common man in his suffering and identifies himself with the surprising but invigorating upsurge among the peasantry of a belligerousness which is gradually replacing former taciturnity and fatalism.

Lal Singh is quickly caught up in the whirlwind of events. He accepts a job with Professor Verma and Count Rampal Singh helping to organise the peasantry of the big estates of Oudh into Kisan Sabhas. He also elopes with Maya, who is now a widow, and they live in the Count's palace which is the headquarters of an amorphous revolutionary movement. Their attempts to unite the peasantry are often abortive and result in bloody clashes with the authorities; on the positive side are Lalu's meeting with Gandhi, Nehru's tour of their district, and the formation of Kisan Sabhas on the Count's estate. Finally the Count, Lalu and a number of peasants are imprisoned. However, the trilogy ends not with a sense of historical meaninglessness and despair but with fruitful bewilderment, self-questioning, self-understanding and hope. Lalu's jail ruminations reveal the epic bewilderment in modern man's contemplation of contemporary events:

"Why had a whole generation been wiped off the earth?....Why were there food riots in Germany? What had happened to the square of land I was promised by the Sarkar?...Why the money famine?...Why was the speculation in Bombay not stopped and why was the blood money of contractors not taxed? Why the scarcity, the restlessness, the uncertainty in Vilayat as well as in Hindustan?...

What is the destiny of man and how can I control it? Why is it that after a long time of struggle...after all the effort I made to cure the defects of my own nature, going deeper than all my deepest discoveries... after seeking to grapple with my own destiny...why is it that I have ended up in this reeking hell...'[30]

Nevertheless it is the asking of such questions that leads Lalu to 'a new ideal of thought and beauty' (p.389) and gives him an exalted sense of mission whereby he will help 'to banish all the lies of religion and to break the narrow walls which separate man from man' (p.392). Lalu learns to contemplate his past with detachment and self-understanding and to envisage the future direction of India's epic struggle; and it is at this point, and with the symbolic hope for the future conveyed in the news that Maya has given birth to a son, that the trilogy ends.

It is made clear in The Sword and the Sickle that the basic epic premise underlying the trilogy is the universality of man and his experiences, particularly suffering:

Everywhere it was the same...there were no black or white people, no yellow or brown people, not even Francicis and Germans, and English and Hindustanis, and Chinis and Japanis, but there were only two races and two religions in the world, the rich and the poor. (p.85)

And in the novel Anand has Gandhi remark:

30 The Sword and the Sickle, Bombay, Kutub, 1955, p.388. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

"Suffering is the mark of the human tribe. It is an eternal law...No country has ever risen without being purified through the fire of suffering..." (p.203)

The trilogy is an attempt to write what Anand described in Apology for Heroism as India's 'epic of...suffering' and 'epic of misery' (p.70), and which he said had not been written 'adequately, because the realities were too crude for a writer like Tagore; and it was not easy to write an epic in India while all the intricate problems of the individual in the new world had yet to be solved' (p.61). The trilogy is also an attempt to solve these problems from an Indian point of view.

Anand adopts the Gandhian attitude to suggest that the truly epic quality in suffering is the aspiration for human freedom that results from purification. When Lalu realises there is a 'purpose' in 'suffering' he experiences a state of euphoria common to revolutionaries before they become disillusioned:

He felt he could go far, far to the ends of the earth, and in him, his soul was expanding, shouting, bursting... It almost seemed to him that he could now hope to master his destiny, since he had at least the rudiments of freedom through which he could choose to do what he liked in this circumscribed universe. (p.78).

However, at this imperfect stage of Lalu's development his aspiration is epic not in its relation to real life but as a delusion that some socio-political apparatus

will perfect the millenium; the state refuses to wither away. Lalu's fantasy of an uncircumscribed material universe in which he can 'do what he liked' seems to smack of hubris; on the other hand, it is not altogether inconsistent with the ultimate goal of Hinduism.

Nevertheless the trilogy, and the third book in particular, is concerned with real problems and the achievement of real liberties. The lesson that Anand seems bent on teaching Lalu from practical experience is that the achievement of freedom, self-mastery and human dignity depend (as he says in Apology for Heroism) on man's capacity to evolve 'the perfection of oneself and of the universe in which one lives' through 'the deepest socialism' (pp.103,106). Moreover, what Lalu seems really to be looking for is not totalitarian control of egalitarian man but a system, based on economic and social justice, which will ensure the moral development of the whole man. The epic aspiration in Anand's vision resides in the intellectual grandeur with which he attempts to transfigure the revolutionary world, but it is a grandeur which can never be saved from human imperfection.

Perhaps the most thematically-suggestive epic element in the trilogy is mythic, while Anand's use of Indian epic metaphor and his invocation of mythic

archetypes contribute significantly to the trilogy's structural unity. However, one must distinguish in Anand's mythic approach epic meaning from mere description. For example, in The Village notions of a punishing God and images of cosmic hostility reinforce the idea that the modern world is Kalyug, the age of darkness. And in sociological terms, so it is according to Anand. Further, the motif of Kalyug as race karma foreshadows tragic action in the trilogy. On the other hand, when Anand describes the 'twilight...falling as if the hand of God was throwing invisible dust into the open eyes of the world',[31] he is simply writing decoratively in a folk manner.

In The Village Anand provides a mythopoeic cosmic canopy for the action which, under such ubiquitous influence, becomes almost ritualistic at crucial moments. Thus, the peasants' relationship with the earth they plough and sow, communal and family observances, Lalu's cutting of his hair and subsequent punishment, and Sharm Singh's revenge are dramatic actions which have ritualistic significance. When Lalu returns to Mandpur to see his dying father and learns of Sharm Singh's catastrophe, the tragedy is for him a ritual agony of the 'old world':

31 The Village, Bombay, Kutub-Popular, 1960, p.50. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

A sense of doom was creeping into him, a sense of fear and abject horror of the dark, unknown forces of this old world that weighed heavily on everything, even on him who had seen the new things and didn't believe in superstition or in the hosts of dark forces...(pp.206-7)

In Across the Black Waters Anand sets the natural landscape against a mythic landscape lurid with nightmare scenarios of cosmic destruction and inferno, and in doing so he relies on traditional associations of war with the Indian gods and goddesses of destruction. The 'age of darkness' which had been prophesied at the beginning of The Village is now in full ascendancy. The Kalyug is graphically suggested by Anand's pictorial and symphonic emphases on dark colours in a stark, cold, bleak, rotting, wind-bitten, scarred, exploding setting where the snow in its whiteness is sinister and confusing.[32] A reiterated imagery of supplication suggests the brooding influence of destructive deities. In this setting the ghastly ritual of 'blood-letting' is enacted over and over again.

The 'tortuous journey into the unknown' (p.72) is a descent from Vilayat first experienced by the sepoys as 'paradise' into the battlefield, variously described in symbolic terms as 'hell', 'netherworld', 'Purgatory' and 'underground'. The existential theme is announced shortly after the army's arrival at the front where life

32 For examples see Across the Black Waters, Bombay, Kutub, 1955, pp.89,94,150,166,163,178,233,242,250, 253,290. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

is a matter of 'elemental necessities' and ritual-like ordeals by water (flooded trenches, drowning) and a fire (the conflagration of war):

...the days were the colour of the nights...and the murky, greenish grey sky was the exact colour of the roof of hell which the sages in India spoke about, when the souls of the sinners were subjected to the ordeals, first of trailing through the mud of marshes, full of slimy, ravenous rats and blood-sucking leeches, then through a forest of tangled bushes and thicket of thorns, then to wait in misery, naked and cold and hungry, for the coming of the rain which was to wash them clean of their sins, for the ordeal of fire which was to purge them, and for the final judgment before the throne of Brahma...They...were now in the stage of waiting in this vast, timeless universe for their doom to fulfil itself as if they had been suddenly transplanted into the world of their ancestors where men struggled against the elements, the Gods and Destiny. (p.118)

Similar identifications of war with the hells of Indian mythology are scattered throughout the novel to reinforce the illusion of existential torment, trial and suffering.[33]

Presiding over the warring earth are 'fate', 'destiny', 'hordes of demons', 'God', 'Kali', 'Yama', 'Mars'. Lalu's reactions to the war take on a quality of metaphysical terror and pessimism. Nightmare reality and nightmare dream are transposed disconcertingly. Lalu's sleep becomes a nightmare in which Kali superintends a ritual of desecration on a surreal earth—a

33 Eg.pp.155 and 215.

stagnant scum of butchered heads; 'she shook the bells on her feet so that a great music of annihilation began' (p.136). Further references to Kali, Yama and Mars[34] fully establish mythopoeic motif in the novel's structure. The dominant mood is a kind of Hardyesque cosmic pessimism and irony fostered by the idea of a retributive deity or inexorable fate—'as if God were enjoying himself at this destruction' (p.132). Thus it is not surprising that the Indian characters, in reacting to the war by drawing upon a traditional fatalism, should express these reactions epigrammatically and mythopoeically.

Against this cosmic fate the simplicity, courage, dignity and goodwill of many of the Indian soldiers assume the proportions of epic heroism. As such Anand can romanticise (deliberately) his belief that humanity and goodness can yet prevail:

> And yet, and yet in the face of the Unknown, in full view of the spectacle of Destruction and Death, in the muteness of obedience, he [Lalu] yielded to the suggestions of an instinct which was the revenge of his body upon sadness—a strange purblind tenderness of Love. (p.216)

Inevitably one starts to ask the question: is the mythos in Across the Black Waters mainly a figurative descriptive analogical way of representing temporal

34 pp.91,121,155,160,286.

reality, or does it carry with it the living force of what is thought to be some kind of metaphysical illumination? Anand's position seems to be something of a humanistic paradox. Certainly the mythic archetypes are seen to be still alive in Lalu on the battlefield, but when his character is considered as an entity spanning the three novels it seems that in the middle work Lalu (and possibly Anand as well) is shown purging himself preparatory to exorcising the demons of the old world. This seems to be borne out in the light of Lalu's new state of mind in the final novel where the main emphasis is on Reason instead of the irrational.

Indeed, from the dark night of the soul in Across the Black Waters to the awakening to 'the noble ideal of Revolution' in The Sword and the Sickle (p.105) marks a considerable transition in Lal Singh's character, and he emerges as a fully-fledged modern protagonist on the threshold of selfhood, an isolated modern mind tortuously finding its way out of hell towards a reconciliation of inner truth and outer purposes. When embarking for Europe, at the end of The Village, Lalu thought: "None of them can enter my skin" "and see it as I do" (p.249). On his return from Europe he is an Outsider (the now conventional persona of the contemporary hero in modern mythos and epic)—'as if he had, through his exile, condemned

himself to be a complete outsider for ever, a stranger, changed beyond recognition, a ghost from another world' (The Sword and the Sickle, p.46). This is how he feels in his India, in his village. 'The picture of his past life...all seemed legendary' (p.37). Thus The Sword and the Sickle becomes principally Lalu's (and by implication Anand's) search for identity, and after many experiences and much self-confrontation he finds his identity through the modern myths—the People, Revolution, Reason, Love.

Lalu begins his quest a primal being conscious of his individuality; having survived the general death, he emerges from war further individualised; 'the gulf between himself and his village' indicates his newly acquired detachment as 'he stood there towering over the walls like a cave man awakened from a previous century' (The Sword and the Sickle, p.43). From the beginning he acts and thinks from the heart and from instinct, and his progress towards maturity is a series of initiations into the mysteries of the 'God of Reason' until at the end he has begun to 'master his destiny', to acquire self-discipline, and to comprehend the Revolution as a rational order in which the whole man can express himself as a being in whom reason, emotion and imagination are harmoniously integrated. This represents a development from animal man to perfected man and involves the acquisition of such moral qualities

as 'enlightened will', man's 'faith in himself', 'responsibility' and 'sense of duty'—terms Anand uses on a number of occasions. The development of Lalu's character is intended to signify that he is activated by a truly epic motive which points the way to the salvation of modern man. It is also intended to signify that the modern Indian must overcome the conflict of values inherent in his nature as a result of the incompatibility between many aspects of tradition and modernity. Anand drew attention to this in Across the Black Waters in a passage which Srinivas Iyengar regards as 'the key to Lalu's character, the key to the understanding of the entire trilogy':[35]

> In him the two poles of nature seemed always to have been quarrelling as if he had not decided whether to burst out of his skin, as it were, and live outside himself, or to recline back, self-exiled, pain-marred, mutilated with the memories of those hindrances which the world had put in front of him. The two anti-types had revolved in a furious whirl of the axéá tree during his boyhood. (p.250).

Further, the Revolution is seen as the means of rationally sublimating 'the blood-lust of...ancestors' and releasing the 'passions', 'new ideas and impulses' which were 'suppressed by the taboos of religion for generations' and were 'brewing all the decayed putrescence of the past' (The Sword and the Sickle, p.218).

35 Indian Writing in English, p.274.

Thus, towards the end of the trilogy Lalu realises that the 'struggle' is based on conscious control of the irrational and that this involves defecting for the time being from the ordinary human order of love in helping to achieve an impersonal social order of love. At the end he begins to reconcile the two kinds of love, and the outer and innder sides of his nature, when he addressed his prayer of comradeship to Maya. While perhaps acceptable as a kind of folk form, this prayer, however, lapses into a sentimental mysticism of the Proletarian myth. Also, the disturbing thought remains that the sacrifice whereby 'one must learn...to discard one's family' (p.392) for the brotherhood of all is, humanistically, somewhat of a moral contradiction.

In The Sword and the Sickle, then, the new mythos—the People, Revolution, Reason, Love—takes the place of the old metaphysical mythos which provided the symbolic framework of Across the Black Waters. Quite early in the last novel Anand specifically defines the 'new Fate' which replaced the 'old Fate' yet was 'as cruel...as the ancient Fate':

It was a Fate which seemed to him to have been working before the war...which had something to do with the school he went to, with the macadamized roads which had connected the village to the town for movement and transport, with miles of railways...with telephones without wires, and the war...it seemed to have been hidden behind the illusions to which he had aspired, behind the mirage of

picturesque Vilayati farms and Sahibhood. But now from the corroded hearts of the people at him and his own bafflement, he had vague glimmerings of this new, inexorable Deity in the Pantheon of Indian Gods. It was disguised in the din and bustle of the cities...and in his own despair. He would look for it, he would track it down, the oppressor that drowned the agonies of the people—he would know it and seek to master it! (p.67)

The new Fate then is historical process according to the Marxist view of history, and the new Kali of this process is a hybrid Indo-British bourgeois-capitalist-imperialist-landlord ogre.

Anand's new mythos has a variety of archetypal manifestations and mythic values. Its classic incarnation (referred to reverentially) is the Russian Revolution, while in India it is the potential 'new force...rushing towards the light' (p.73); Marx, Lenin, Gandhi and Nehru are its epic avatars; it propagates ideas about the two classes, rich and poor, with typically mythical certitude and over-simplification; and it speaks with the voice of Humanism intoning "love and understanding", not "murder", as the "way" to the "imagined utopia" (p.339). The title of the third novel, derived from the following stanza in Blake's "Merlin's Prophecy"

> The sword sung on the barren heath,
> The sickle in the fruitful field:
> The sword he sung a song of death,
> But could not make the sickle yield

indicates that the new Fate's symbols, sword and sickle, are mythically meaningful. The Sword is Kali's sword (the bourgeoisie) and the Sickle represents the fruitful earth-power of the peasantry—the proletariat in the new society.

In Apology for Heroism Anand writes:

...there is a living myth and a dead myth, and the desire image, which is the basis of revolutionary romanticism, must be really creative and must help men to integrate in society and not provide a formula for escape. Poetry must become a kind of courage. (p.90)

This passage defines fairly accurately Lalu's groping aspiration, a reaching out through 'revolutionary romanticism' for the 'desire image' of the new myths. The 'poetry' is based on the identification of freedom with socialism and the axiom that in the revolutionary consciousness reality is perceived at its height. Anand suggests that the Revolution will free man from the docile acceptance of the Vedantic tradition which, he says in Apology for Heroism, forces man to remain a 'fictional being...seeking to become one with the omnipotent...but really consigned to the iniquities of hell on earth' (p.41). In The Sword and the Sickle Anand attempts to show the way of Marxist liberation to peasants who believed 'in the other world' because they 'expected nothing from this' (p.131).

Now, in view of the prominence of this attitude,

it is an interesting fact that Anand rejects the old mythos of the Vedantic Absolute yet retains the old behaviouristic archetypal desire for identity with an Absolute. Lalu faces the typical modern choice of standing apart or identifying himself with a cause, and as a protagonist lost in the fractured wilderness between past and present Lalu mythologises an Indian sociological phenomenon which is of epic proportions. Considering the dramatic action as a mythic action, then, one can follow Lalu's labyrinthine course from isolation to identity in terms of the archetypal quest motive, recognising that the conventional trials and sought-for grail have their contemporary counterparts:

> ...the present society [was] evil, and the task of uprooting it a sacred duty....Only he feared that he was going into the dark night for a future where he might lose the way, the right path. (p.246)

Lalu is tempted away from the right path because of the personal happiness he derives with Maya: in mythic terms and in keeping with her name she has a propensity for distraction. Nevertheless, stronger than Maya is the archetype of renunciation. Thus Lalu, confronting the new world as an Outsider, faces the choice of either becoming an iconoclastic anti-hero, or of attaining true heroism and fulfilling the destiny of 'Self' by losing 'self' in the Absolute of the Marxist dream; and of

course resolution is in favour of the latter, in favour of what is a modern transfiguration of the traditional Vedantic motive. So what has really happened in the central action of the trilogy is that the protagonist and the author have remained characteristically Indian (almost in spite of themselves), and that there has been a transfiguration of Absolutes from the Vedantic and other-worldly to the Marxist and worldly.

Every epic story, experience and meaning requires a corresponding epic style or, in these times of literary criticism, a theory of epic form. This style and form as it affected his own work, especially the trilogy, Anand defined in Apology for Heroism as poetic realism:

> Though I believe in realism, I am...for a poetic realism. I would like, for instance, to stress the importance of the desire image, or the romantic will, in writing, and I stand altogether for art against literary photography. And just as I found myself insisting on a synthesis of the values so far bifurcated in Europe, just as I desired a total and truly human view of experience, a view of the whole man, in order that a completely new kind of revolutionary human may arise, so I have been inclined to stress the need for a truly humanist art commensurate with the needs of our time. (p.86)

Thus by poetic Anand tends to mean the impulse of 'romantic will' and by realism the humanistic 'view

of the whole man', while the two together imply a moral responsibility on the author's part to recognise that man is the central fact in the universe and to help transform society for the better.

Anand's concept of poetic realism has interesting and sometimes unexpected analogies with various literary traditions, movements and ideologies. Thus poetic realism absorbs the Indian folk tradition, with its strong sense of communal ethos, and Indian epic and metaphoric traditions; at the same time it absorbs continental Realism and Naturalism, Russian supra-realism, and the literary Leftism of the Thirties. Yet, while accepting many premises of the literary Marxists like Christopher Caudwell, poetic realism also has some affinity with the succeeding Anarchist-Romantic generation.

An interesting parallel with Anand's 'romantic will' is provided, for example, by Alex Comfort's Art and Social Responsibility. And although poetic realism stylises the millenarian myth in terms broadly comparable to Caudwell's, Anand the romanticist is in fundamental agreement with Comfort when the latter declares:

> ...to follow Caudwell's conception is to limit the number of levels on which art could or should exist. The unit with which the artist is concerned is first of all the individual human being.
>
> The value of Marxist criticism has lain, however, in its perpetual emphasis on the environmental concern of the artist...Writers who are afraid to throw their

weight into the cause of the humanity they recognise will find little in the tradition of romanticism to support their abstention...It is the concept of irresponsible society, whatever its social organisation, that is now, and always has been, the enemy of the romantic conception of man...[36]

Comfort's notion of romantic 'responsibility borne out of a sense of victimhood, of community in a hostile universe...of Man against Barbarism, community against irresponsibility' (p.38) coincides with the responsibility Anand advocates through Lal Singh.

Like Anand, Comfort does not regard realism as an anti-romantic form, and his theory of the 'invasion of realist technique by romantic ideas' (p.47) on the metaphysical level of the fight against death, and on the realistic level of the fight against individuals and institutions who are enemies of humanity, accurately describes Across the Black Waters. In the novel the fight against death takes place, of course, on the universal level of war, and metaphysically in the confrontation of Life and Kali or Yama. Individuals like the inhumane Lok Nath and the sycophantic Subah Singh, anonymous people in authority, and institutions like the Sarkar are guilty of irresponsibility; as a result the sepoys are likely to become, as an English officer says, "victims of civilization" (p.193). Lalu

36 Art and Social Responsibility, Falcon Press, 1946, pp.34,35.

almost suspects that the war resulted from a general having given the wrong orders and that it would be called off if his superiors found out. There are further references to 'irresponsible generals' (p.233) and to Lalu as 'victim' (p.233) which reinforce Anand's 'romantic' view-point.

Another 'poetic' element in Anand's poetic realism is to be found in various stylistic folk effects. Of these perhaps the most noticeable, and yet the most difficult to assess, is the general impression of consciously exercised informality underlying the narrative method, as if Anand wished to convey life with an artistic freedom that will approximate to much of life's singularity and random arbitrariness. This is in keeping with his belief in 'the Indian idea of emphasising expression rather than form'.[37]

Anand also draws upon the folk tradition in his abundant use of personification (particularly of the machine, meteorological phenomena and macrocosmic powers), epic and mythic frame of reference, and the rhetorical reiterative voice. In general he maintains some allegiance to the folk narrative style, and on occasions deliberately employs folk intonations and rhythms. For example:

37 In the letter to me dated 24th June, 1965.

> And then had come the Angrezi Sarkar, like an invisible shadow, as one-eyed Sukhua had said, spreading over this anonymous countryside where men and women and children and cattle had grown and died, nameless, like plants. And this Sarkar had built roads and begun to push the peasants out on them by rolling up their land...
>
> Oh, the coming of the Angrezi Sarkar had been like the coming of a flood, a flood greater than any which the Ganges had carried through the centuries...Such a vast, gigantic transformation had it wrought that one could not blame it or praise it, one could merely stand aside for a moment and contemplate its potencies, stand aghast and gaze, wide-eyed, at its invisible, insidious presence, gaze at it as one gazes at a god, merely to see its magnificent, all embracing, omnipresent, omniscient being in action and to seek to understand its inscrutable, inexorable presence, to realize the reality behind its various manifestations... (The Sword and the Sickle, p.192)

Here are such characteristic elements of the folk imagination as reiterative rhythm, dramatic use of connectives, a love of rhetorical crescendo and terminological superfluity, a diuturnal sense of life, the consciousness of elemental realities, the measurement of time in terms of historic event, similes drawn from nature, the mythopoeic faculty for measuring earthly occurrences macrocosmically, romantic awe, and the sensitivity and familiarity with which the omnipresent is regarded.

The familial theme, in The Village, of the prodigal son's defection, his rebelliousness and guilty sense of obligation and responsibility, and his family's doom

at the hands of the Furies of their fate, is a folk preoccupation. Also dialogue is often intended to capture the folk spirit, especially when characters speak metaphorically, parabolically, homiletically, aphoristically or epigrammatically. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether an appeal to the Indian oracular tradition can justify the long spontaneous speeches of the Count, Verma and Sarshar which have a distressing sameness. Earthy and comic frankness is another folk element in the trilogy, and ranges from Rabelaisian descriptions like 'the strained visage of Seth Chamal Lal lifting his rump to let loose a noise' (The Village, p.250) to the frequent 'rape-sister' profanities etc.

So much, then, for the 'poetic' elements of the trilogy's poetic realism. Apart from the humanistic philosophy discussed earlier, 'realism' in the trilogy is identifiable in Anand's usual realistic habits of description, dialogue, characterisation, social observation and attitude. In The Sword and the Sickle, in which Gandhi and Nehru are involved with the main characters, he makes more of this technique of characterising national figures than previously. Such a technique is basically designed to break down the barriers between fiction and real life, as well as adding to the sociological theme. Fictional characters are usually introduced naturalistically, for example: 'He paled and then, shaking from head to

foot with nervous agitation, he shuffled on his legs as if he had urinated with fear' (The Village, p.1). Anand's language, when it is not tautological, metaphorical, or translating folk sensibilities, is straightforwardly realistic. At times, however, he seems to find cliches irrepressible, for example: 'waxing poetical', 'ominous silence', 'hail of lead', 'pearly beads', 'a puffed-up balloon of pride', and so on. But Anand can also strike the right note of familiarity with an apt figure of speech, for example: 'A piece of shrapnel fell right into the dug-out, sizzling like a chunk of butter' (Across the Black Waters, p.150); 'his straight hair weighting his forehead and giving him the air of being ducked in thought' (The Sword and the Sickle, p.88).

However, when the trilogy is considered as a totality it is clear that its epic character could not depend to a large extent on Anand's style—even allowing for the theory underlying poetic realism. On the other hand, it is critically demonstrable that the trilogy has a motive, structure and mythic code which are 'epic', at least in Anand's sense of the term and within Indian contexts. For this reason, then, S. Menon Marath is perhaps justified in regarding the trilogy as the 'finest and the most balanced' of Anand's works.[38]

38 "Three Indian Novelists", Life and Letters, Vol.59 1948 p.190.

4 EPISODES OF THE HEART

The novels which followed the trilogy—The Big Heart (1945), Seven Summers (1951), Private Life of an Indian Prince (1953), The Old Woman and the Cow (1960), The Road (1961), Death of a Hero (1963)—are to some extent recapitulations and variations of earlier attitudes, methods and situations as well as new experiments using different material. They are all episodes of the heart in the sense that through them one can see taking final shape Anand's philosophy of humanism as it relates to the compassionate potentialities of man and not merely to world-order concepts. As in all Anand's previous novels, the individual versus society situation is still most important, and in The Big Heart and Private Life of an Indian Prince, in particular, he explores the predicament with some new twists of the knife. On the other hand, Anand's most recent fiction —his last three novels in fact—are quite minor productions.

The Big Heart marks a return, structurally, to the semi-classical dramatic unities of Untouchable. The story consists of a simple, fairly primal action confined to a single day and virtually a single setting. Ananta, 'the big heart', tries to convince his fellow coppersmiths that, although it is economically impossible for them to continue as individual craftsmen, they should form a union, accept the machine as the new basis of production, and make the factory system one of mutual benefit through which they can express their talents and receive just wages for their labour. He has to contend with their apathy, despair and self-destructive hatred for the factory which has put them out of work; and with his former friend, Rālia, whose frustration and anger can find an outlet only in demented anarchy. Communal and personal conflict of this nature is the basis of this proletarian drama. The day's events, moving through disquiet, hope, counsel, sectarian intrigue to destruction, gather tragic momentum and culminate in Ralia's maniacal destruction of the factory machines and his murder of Ananta who had intervened and subdued him. The action is confined to Kucha Billimaran in the centre of Amritsar, and is enacted before such impervious historical witnesses as the Shrine of Kali, the Sikh Golden Temple, and the British Clock Tower.

The sociological idea of tragedy which was formulated in Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud is taken a stage further in The Big Heart in which more appropriate literary measures, particularly use of the dramatic unities, achieve greater dramatic intensity and coherence. Tragic emotion emanates from the human consequences of this dissolution of the thathiar brotherhood, and from this enacted as dramatic myth (the conflict between Ananta and Ralia) in such a way that social reality is crystallised into its pure terms, to the Cain-Abel elements. Ananta is a visionary who has the moral strength and nobility of heart to master the new fate—the machine—but he is destroyed by one who channels his socially-determined despair into evil carnage. This simply is the tragedy of a moral intelligence of the heart defeated not by its own flawed nature (even though Ananta is aware that he lacks full understanding) but by a diseased victim of society who symbolises humanity's inability to control its environmental fate.

In preparing for the catastrophe, Anand relies mainly on what had become for him established procedures: the build-up of an atmosphere of impending doom through anticipatory motif, presentiment, premonitory dream, mood; thematic emphasis on darkness, fate, inferno; the placing of event and character within a mythic dimension; the tragic idea of

victimhood and the partial triumph of evil and duplicity over good and innocence; and the use of a simple language intended to relate the action to primal emotions. Thus, in the opening scene of the novel Ananta remembers a dream of the previous night in which memories of his dead mother and the image of his consumptive mistress, Janki, merge into a cremation-scene portraying Kali performing her dance of death upon the corpses.

This nightmare hints substantially at what is to come. It suggests the tragic division in Ananta between love and mission which becomes evident during the day as he oscillates between Janki and the desperate thathiars. It is a 'tragic' division in the sense that love and mission cannot be differentiated in the big heart, and because each involves sacrifices beyond the ordinary, for both Janki and the brotherhood are facing separate dooms. References in the dream to Ananta addressing the crowd and being chased by a mob with blood on their hands anticipate Ananta's role as a frustrated saviour offering brotherhood and his destiny as a martyr to the big heart. During the day he tries to form a union, consults with the poet who has a wealth of experience, argues against the violent Judas elements in his ranks, negotiates with a 'boss', tries to prevent 'revolution-

ary incendiarism',[39] and of course dies in his attempt to put a stop to wanton destruction.

Ananta tries to convince the thathiars that they have no alternative but to adapt to the new age but that if they master the machine they will achieve new mastery as human beings and new salvations and freedoms for humanity. However, they are still groping in their ancestral darknesses. Ralia's obsessive hatred of the machine is ironically indicative of the machine's mastery over his black tortured soul; his rages often take the form of a 'mock-heroic dance' in which he simulates the noisy activity of the engines in 'a violent caricature of the factory' (pp.108-9). Ananta perceives that the tragedy of the iron age lies in man's relinquishment of rational control over his creations and that this social defection from responsibility corresponds to the individual's failure to achieve self-discipline. (Quite a few Indian novelists—for example Khushwant Singh in Train to Pakistan—regard this combination of social and personal relinquishment of responsibility as the Indian tragedy.) Thus Ananta tries to convert his thathiar brothers to Non-Violence (see p.21).

Like Gandhi, Ananta is a martyr to the cause and dies violently, his 'skull' cracking 'like a pitcher' (p.214). His earlier nightmare glimpse of his destruction at the hands of Kali is a reality by the end

39 The Big Heart, Bombay, Kutub-Popular (reprint, no date), p.200. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

of the day. 'Menacing like a Colossus, the image of the God Siva himself in his destructive mood' (p.206), Ralia is Kali's consort. During Ralia's crazed onslaught on the factory, his raving—in which he fails to distinguish between man and machine—brings a return to nightmare and mythic chaos:

"...I want blood! I want bones!...I am the bitch goddess machine, han, the Kali of the iron age...I will wed you—I Ralia; I am Shiv and you are Kali ...." (p.210)

The blood he drinks and the bones he breaks are Ananta's.

In preparing for this climax, Anand very deliberately creates a mood of fatalistic inevitability mainly through continued references to the prophetic inexorability of Ananta's dream (see pp.54,55,165), and through a rhythmic and dramatic use of language as chorus. At times, for example, the prose can conceivably be broken down into verse movements:

> Down lonely streets in the villages men walk
> like phantoms,
> their hearts lacerated by the scorpions of regret.
> And as they gather under the banyan tree over the
> hookah,
> and as the cowdust hour settles into the dark,
> they look into the smoky horizons and ask:
> "O silence of earth and sky,
> what is the cause of this blight
> And what is to be done?"
> They do not know, they do not know, they cannot
> understand!
> And there is no answer from heaven. (p.166)

There is no answer from heaven, only 'the ancient Fate which had possessed the coppersmiths and through the acceptance of which they had killed Ananta, the only one of them who had sought to defy that particular destiny' (p.217). It is classically simple and, as we have seen, is classically prepared for.

Ananta's noble stature derives mainly from the qualities of heart he embodies. In him Anand allegorises the need for what he refers to in Apology for Heroism as 'the big, the understanding, the generous, the wise heart, informed by passion and schooled by a knowledge born of love' (p.107). Ananta is a 'rebel' who worships no God and fears no mortal, but he combines with 'a tiger's fury' the animal's 'casual dignity' and he exudes 'contagious warmth'; 'his large, expansive, generous manner, the open, frank, hearty speech...endeared him to those whose impulses were yet free from all restraint' (p.45). He is an innocent roguish Adam whose generous character is evident in his favourite saying, "There is no talk of money, brother; one must have a big heart" (p.11).

The poet sees in Ananta the real foundation of the new man. However, it is the poet who articulates the humanism which the hero enacts:

"...I believe in the restoration of man's integrity... the reassertion of man's dignity, reverence for his name, and a pure love for man in all his strength and weakness, a limitless compassion for man, an unbounded love especially for the poor and down-trodden..." (p.142)

Thus Ananta embodies those qualities of the heart and the poet those of the head which in combination will create the new Adam of Anand's new society. The poet's disquisitional discourses at the end of The Big Heart are not merely a chorus comment on the tragic action: they are intended to leave the reader with a catharsis of hope, and a 'desire image' of which Ananta is a noble sacrificial prelude.

Even so, despite the poet's passionate faith and his belief that "evil people" will "drown" in the "whirlpools" of "their own devilish intrigues" (p.226), it cannot be claimed that The Big Heart resolves in any new way the fundamental problem of evil. On the one hand, the poet acknowledges 'the deep grooves that were cut in one's soul by the hardness, the cruelty of Satan's hooves, the marks of the beast from which people never recovered' (p.222); yet, on the other hand, he dismisses original sin both from the Christian and Hindu standpoint: "...men were not born evil, as the followers of Yessuh Messih say, or as say those in our country who believe that men earn a higher or a lower caste for their good or bad deeds in the previous life" (p.223). Nevertheless, his metaphysical inconsistency apart, the poet's faith that the dignity of man can be achieved through reason, forgiveness and love commands respect.

Seven Summers (1951) is perhaps best read out of chronological relationship with the other novels for, being an autobiography of childhood, it does not have quite the same thematic or formal points of contact with them as they have with each other. Moreover, as it is the first of a projected series of autobiographical novels which are to be based on a 2000 page 'confession' Anand wrote in 1925, presumably when these works appear Seven Summers can be more rewardingly examined in that context. Nevertheless, Seven Summers does have some specific affinities with the early novels, particularly Untouchable. Bakha, Chata and Ram Charan in Untouchable grew out of the early draft of Seven Summers and there are also duplications of incident.

Moreover, Seven Summers is an authentic nostalgic episode of the heart during the formative years of childhood. In this book Anand achieves through impressionistic resonances of memory and supple wording a level of literary expression which has rarely been surpassed in his other novels. The primary strengths and dominant qualities in Seven Summers are mood and the concrete visualisation of past scenes. Mood does much to promote the main preoccupations. These are: the re-creation of an Indian childhood—'the most innocent and sensitive' time of life[40]—with its expanding horizons of self, world

40 Seven Summers, Bombay, Kutub-Popular (no date), p.260. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

and death; delineation of character; depictions of geographical, sociological, domestic, familial, pietistic and supernatural aspects of Indian life; the portrayal of communal existence; landscape as integral to human experience.

Mood in Seven Summers is best demonstrated by quotation. In the following passage, for instance, Anand employs a Wordsworthian technique of recollection and psychological appraisal to convey the child's romantic wonder at the human world with 'its unknown past and its undiscovered future', the vivid clarity of the child's sensuous perceptions of the natural world, and the spiritual immediacy of his intuition of life:

I learned to live on my own resources and to be in tune with the shade of the dense trees in the grove where I roamed, the grasses and flowers of the Sahib's garden, where I occasionally strayed, and the ever-changing life of the road—the road which I crossed from the protection of one line of casuarina trees, stirred by the nimble breeze, to the other, the road in whose dust I rolled, the road where I held conversation with men and beasts and birds, the road which dominated my life with its unknown past and its undiscovered future. And, although still slightly timid in the face of the enigmatic, unresponsive silences, where, I had been told, wandered the souls of the dead who had not ascended to heaven, I often became part of the quietude that spread about me, chirping like a parrot all to myself the phrases I had learnt, creeping like a mouse from ditch to ditch through which the well water flowed, digging up earth worms where I saw any traces of the little congeries of oval earth...

> In these moments I learned, lying on the charpai in the courtyard of the house, to watch with trepidation and dread the vague figures of the gods, jinns and bhuts in the contours of the clouds in the blue kingdom of the sky and to feel an incomprehensible tenderness for the cool which descended on the earth from above at that hour, an almost tangible reality, like a fairy come in answer to the yearnings of my mother, who prayed on her string of beads, seated cross-legged by her mandala like a being from another world, near me and yet afar, distant and remote and rather frightening.
>
> ...in those days the earth and the sky grew bigger, and heavy shadows descended on my eyelids, and my eyes were consumed by dreads and fantasies. (pp.29-30).

There is in the child's vision much of the exaggeration and heightened sensitivity of the romantic temperament. The narrator—Krishna—sees the details of nature, with boy-high microscopic clarity, and the metaphysical beings with telescopic nearness.

As the point of view is that of the child, Krishna sees people impressionistically, for example: 'My mother was...milk and sugar, but my aunt Aggi was like the essence of curds' (p.17). However, this impressionism is not incompatible with concrete data: copious details about the joint family, arranged marriages, adult differences of opinion, the younger generation's striving for independence, domestic and conversational ritual etc. The novel contains numerous sociological observations about India. The cantonment is 'somehow symbolic of modern India, which is nothing if not a patched-up compromise of mechanistic Europe and feudalist Asia' (p.67). Generali-

sations about character and society are actualised in random incidents, particularly the concern for 'izzat', a disposition to intrigue and persecution mania, irrepressibility and impetuosity of temperament, the perpetual imminence of hostility from nature or man, lack of privacy, and so on.

Also important is the impact of some of the short scenes which display Anand's capacity for dramatisation and the fusion he can achieve of nostalgic mood and clear visualisation. A good example is Krishna's first day at school. Krishna congratulates himself for being able to recite a poem whereas those who failed to had to hold their ears, bend over, and receive the slaps of the teacher's cow-hide shoes. "Up, up with your bottoms, up with your behinds, donkeys, seeds of dogs!" (p.102), the teacher shrilly commands. However, Krishna's self-satisfaction is shortlived, for he is instructed to administer some of the punishment and, worse, is himself in turn punished by the teacher for inefficiency and lack of enthusiasm. After school those whom he had been forced to flog return the action in kind. The situation is brought to life with a gusto which contains a kind of wry comic irony implicit in this very Indian spectacle of an ingenuous victim of circumstances.

Landscape symbolism in Seven Summers also serves to centralise emotionally various recollected experiences and to identify some Indian elements in Krishna's sensibility. There are three symbols—road, river, mountains—and they are romantic in that they satisfy Krishna's

love of long distance 'from horizon to horizon' (p.55) and 'the mood to connect everything with everything else' (p.163). Over the sea horizon is a wish-fulfilment dream of western civilization; the small boy dresses himself 'in paper clothes cut to the English fashion' (p.110).

Along the road has passed mythological and historical India. Krishna's mother told him 'myths and legends ...of the people who had travelled up and down this road' (p.55): the sun God, Surya, the Rain-God, the River and Wind Gods; the ancient Kings in their chariots—Rama, Krishna, Akbar; saints, fakirs, sages, gurus—Valmiki and Nanak; the fojs and lashkars of the Mughals; the armies of the Ferungis; the Dogra regiment. The road's rhythm becomes Krishna's rhythm:

> as though the road were in me and the whole world all about me, stretching for miles and miles and miles into nebulous lands uncharted by my mind...The forefinger of amazement was in my mouth as I stood there...(p.57)

Such is the creative imagination of the romantic ego, 'the pertinacity in logic of the <u>enfant terrible</u>' (p.107): Wordsworth's 'deeply interfused' force that 'runs through all things' and Rimbaud's gluttonous illusion of possessing the universe—or being possessed by it.

The road and the river are associated with time and the acquisition of knowledge. Both symbols register the passing of general human time, and each represents a

stage in Krishna's development and widening knowledge of the world—'The Road' section his first five years and 'The River' section the remaining years of childhood. The child's development, which begins as an impression of reality, proceeds to questions about the nature of that reality. The river symbolises this second stage:

> I was now perplexed by the problem of how the water moved and why the alarming velocity of all the rivers flowing into the sea did not make the sea overflow and flood the earth over everyone's head.

Thus, whereas the road stimulates 'self-illumination and discovery' and 'spiritual training leading to the preservation of the being itself' (p.7), the river encourages a more scientific understanding of nature —'one merely records...actions and tries to understand their causes' (p.58). The road also exemplifies the individual's connection with society and his mythic past; while the river is the broad river of life into which all individual lives flow—'I see myself...flowing like a stream...in the main...with the other stream' (p.259), Krishna says.

Hills and mountains are often presented as extensions of mind, or external equivalents of psychic states and dispositions. They also epitomise human aspiration to truth and have mystical significance as 'ladders of heaven' (p.260). These landscape symbols are far from esoteric; associated directly with the

meaning of life and with spiritual values, they are comparable to the Great Trunk Road, the Ganges and the Himalayas which are central to the Hindu metaphysical scheme.

In no other novel has Anand been so tempted by the intangible in a purely non-political, non-sociological sense; nevertheless, he is able at certain moments—as 'vague figures' shrink 'beneath the burning suns in the great hollows of older days' or fade 'into the indeterminate dark dense nights of the past' (p.239)—to visualise an enchantment in an emotionally authentic way. The truth of Seven Summers as an episode of the heart requires no philosophical or humanistic exegesis, no didactic rationale. Fortunately none were proposed.

Private Life of an Indian Prince is the most uncharacteristic of Anand's novels. It is a psychotic odyssey. There is no proletarian hero, no significant preoccupation with the common man. Although the novel is the story of a Prince (Victor Edward George Ashok Kumar), and is set in the Independence period of the dissolution of the Princely states, it is a psychological case-history rather than a sociological or historical dossier. Certainly, Anand does not ignore the political implications of the Prince's story, but the main emphasis is subjective. 'We had all been so sunk in the morass of our own subjectivism', declares the narrator, 'that

everything outside us seemed to be contracting, withering, darkening' (p.225).

Anand's use of the first-person point of view encourages this subjective tendency. The narrator is the Prince's personal physician, Dr. Shankar; as such he is well qualified, not merely to portray the private life of a person fairly remote from ordinary experience, but also to give an account of the various stages of Victor's interior derangement. It is natural that Victor should confide in Shankar, seek his views, and make him the repository of his confessions. Shankar has a clearly defined objective, compassionate and Freudian role both as character and narrator; thus when the doctor refers to the Prince as 'an important case history for my files' (p.104) he is speaking as physician and narrator simultaneously. Anand allows Shankar considerable latitude in the way of observation, report, comment and explication. Shankar's credentials of intimacy are impressive: he is always in Victor's company, except when Victor is in bed with his mistress, Ganga Dasi (though the Prince faithfully reports the details); he is an embarrassed but adept eavesdropper—'My curiosity had made me stand long enough outside the door' (p.142). In Part One Shankar provides important background information regarding the Prince through 'colloquy' (pp.14-15) and synopsis (pp.38-50). And he is at all times free to interrupt the story to provide the reader with data relevant to an understanding of the situation or person under discussion, or to respond to

the action by way of expatiation or mental peregrination.

Private Life of an Indian Prince opens on a note of distraught eroticism and its close is a collapse into hysteria and madness. The Prince's introduction to the reader coincides with the tail-end of one of his 'mad sexual adventures' in Simla which results in an accusation of rape and hectic scandal. Already in the grip of a nervous disorder, Victor behaves histrionically and hysterically. His condition is occasioned mainly by the turmoil of his private life, in particular the overwhelming obsessive passion for Ganga Dasi. He is caught between the selfish demands and fickle attentions of his nymphomaniac mistress and the justified attempts by his discarded long-suffering wife, Indira, to curb his irresponsibility. Gangi has been plotting against Indira and her son and Indira retaliates by appealing to the government which refuses to recognise Gangi as the official Rani and continues to recognise Indira.

Part Two, set in the Prince's state of Sham Pur, traces the deterioration of his relationship with Gangi and the complete decline of his political power. Shankar generously sees in these personal disasters 'the concentration of all the social "fates" in a Greek tragedy' (p.274), and the reader is supposed to be persuaded by such overt literary propaganda that he is really experiencing (to quote one critic of the novel in whom adulation gets the better of good sense) 'a Dostoevskian

novel on the grand scale'.[41] Gangi emerges as a complex neurotic who posseses extraordinary powers of sexual attraction. She is an opportunist with an inordinate love of power, a 'schizoid' sadist-masochist who indulges her excessive libido in abnormal practices. She is self-centred, emotionally insecure, worldly, destructive, promiscuous, ignorant, cruel, weak-willed morally, strong-willed egoistically, spiritually empty, possessive. Shankar concludes that she is motivated by an Oedipal compulsion to wage an 'amazonian revenge against man' (p.125). Clearly Victor could not have been more unlucky in his choice of paramour. Frustrated in her desire to achieve full official status and privilege, and aware of the Prince's impending political humiliation, Gangi takes other lovers for the purpose of cultivating influential allies as well as revenging herself on Victor. After a series of frantic rapprochements, Gangi leaves Victor when he goes to Delhi to sign the Instrument of Accession. Soon after he is ordered to take a European vacation.

Part Three relates the Prince's stay in London where he indulges in a sentimental affair with an English shop assistant in an attempt to allay his obsessive longings for Gangi. However, he soon relapses into hopeless erotic melancholy. Victor arranges the murder of Gangi's

41 Saros Cowasjee, "Mulk Raj Anand: Princes and Proletarians", The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No.5 July, 1968, p.55.

new lover—formerly his chief minister—and loses his sanity immediately prior to his enforced departure for India. The novel ends (Part Four) with Victor's nightmare lunacy, Shankar's reflections on the human condition, and Indira's resolve to tend her shattered husband. Private Life of an Indian Prince is thus primarily the story of a calamitous carnal obsession. Victor provides the drama, and Shankar the analytical contemplation of it.

The narrator's prismatic analysis of Victor's condition can be simplified into two basic categories of observation; clinical or Freudian, and sociological or 'humanistic'. Clinically, Shankar dwells on the unconscious, instinctual, biological, sexual and Oedipal origins of Victor's neurosis. He encourages his patient in the psycho-analytic procedure of 'tracking the surface emotions to the ultimate motivation' (p.85). Thus the narrative reads at times like a psychiatric textbook, though Shankar does have the sense to feel a little preposterous when he speaks such jargon as "the uncoiling of the ego from the libido and mortido tensions" (p.121). Sociologically, Shankar diagnoses Victor as the product of unfortunate historical and environmental circumstances; in Victor princely tradition and modern morality joined forces only in a purely destructive sense, generating the libertine 'megalomania of a complete egocentric' (p.34); 'the most barbaric impulses of both civilizations dominated him' (p.52).

The Prince allegorises Indo-European contradiction and the Indian need for a healthy synthesis of the old and the new; his 'rootlessness' is the 'malady' of a 'dying society' (p.252). This, of course, is one of the most potent and representative themes in modern Indian fiction.

Shankar's clinical evaluations are complemented by an image pattern representing psychotic nightmare. Jungle metaphors in particular suggest that Victor's condition is a 'primeval horror' (see pp.56,93,315, 317-19). In the human heart the law of the jungle prevails; beast preys on beast; treachery succeeds; nature is diabolical; the most beautiful flower is a botanical Circe. Similarly, disease imagery conveys the carnal sickness and the 'putrescence of the court' (p.153; see also pp.85,87,244,246).

The characterisation of the Prince suffers from psychoanalytic over-documentation and too many tiresome traumas. Moreover Shankar is permitted to indulge his Gothic imagination and to simulate Gothic styles—hyperbolical cliches, descriptive flourishes in which emotions like rage are represented titanically, eerie evocations of the desolate jaded soul, the rendering of states of psychic torment and decay in spectral moody landscapes. Shankar's analysis often leads him beyond psychological naturalism into the melodrama, bathos, sentimentality

and grotesquerie of Gothic romance. Indeed Anand seems to have made an attempt to adapt the madness theme in Romantic literature, for the Prince does emerge as a combination of the Byronic 'wild creature' (p.30) and the haunted psychotic of Poe's tales. Shankar reads like a Poe narrator when he writes:

> I had to close the doors to prevent reverberations of his shrieks from penetrating into the thick night, dense with the sleep of the innocent and guilty alike. (p.126)

Victor wallows in romantic sensibility and egoism, intoning a long section from Shelley's famous free love passage, exalting Gangi as a goddess, and looking like Shankar's 'idea of Mephistopheles' (p.120).

Undoubtedly Anand brings off some dramatic dark effects by contriving Shankar as a kind of Poe narrator who is custodian of another's soul and witness to its Empedoclean destruction; and there is also in Shankar something of the 'secret sharer' intimacy of the Conradian narrator. However, it is equally Anand's intention to balance the novel's horrific darkness with passages of sociological and humanistic illumination. Thus Victor symbolises the Nietzschean corruption of power:

> I sensed the reality of this power and felt that no human being could escape corruption if such unlimited rights were given to him or acquired by him, because the will to power entails a belief in the superman even in the weakest person. (p.81)

Yet, despite the prince's moral and political corruption the novel's major emphasis lies not in the tyrannical abominations of a Marxian ogre but in the pathetic anguish of a fallen autocrat. Compared with Bakha and Munoo Victor represents victimhood at the opposite end of the scale.

Shankar's fragmentary discourses, which at the end of the book fill the narrative vacuum created by Victor's retreat into madness, are mainly reiterations of some of the main points in Apology for Heroism. For example, Shankar advocates Anand's doctrine of humanistic vitalism and revolution—conceived as a product of historical necessity—as a therapeutic solution to Victor's and society's afflictions. Shankar defines the modern humanist as "a new kind of human being" who is "like a point of light" and "a universalist in his vision", and is saved by his positive approach to life from the schizophrenia that afflicts Victor (p.233). Similarly, Shankar's criticism of non-attachment (p.123) and mysticism (p.234), his dismissal of the crude distinction between a spiritual East and materialistic West, his plea for "the recognition of our responsibilities" (p.124), his belief in man (p.233)—in man as a homogeneity, not a "bifurcation", of body and soul (pp.231,331) and as "the final fact of the universe" (p.274), are all attitudes which are paralleled exactly, at times even in phrasing, in Apology for Heroism. Thus Anand is not

entirely justified in claiming in the 'Author's Note' that he has 'reverted to the Indian tradition of anonymity' in his use of the narrator.

In The Old Woman and the Cow Anand returned to the novel of peasant life. This novel might be called his pastoral version of 'poetic realism'. For the first time his main character is a woman, Gauri, though as an Innocent of the Heart she clearly belongs to the same family of peasant protagonist as Bakha and Munoo. Her story is conceived as a folk tale of modern India. The plot is uncomplicated. An archetypal situation—the ceremony and festivity of the arranged marriage between Gauri and Panchi—sets the narrative in motion. Anand reveals in this situation the typical complexity of communal behaviourism which underlies a peasant Hindu marriage: the debt system, financial negotiation, dowry wrangling, familial or mercenary hostilities beneath an exaggerated or transparent courtesy, rudeness and obsequiousness in ceremonial fusion, uninvited guests with the privilege of inviting themselves, lack of privacy, elaborate ritual propriety combined with vulgarity or exhibitionism, jokes and earthy innuendo which are 'part of the time-honoured ritual'.[42]

42 The Old Woman and the Cow, Bombay, Kutub-Popular, 1960, p.22.

The main action of the novel concerns the heroine's travail and it develops conventionally, fluctuating from catastrophe to survival in accordance, as it were, with the inevitable laws of Dharma. Although Gauri savours the joys of connubial union and is a completely devoted wife, her happiness is eroded away in a familiar friction of peasant despair and familial strife. Panchi's possessive aunt Kesaro is hostile to her, and when the rains fail Gauri is accused of inauspiciousness and infidelity. Banished although pregnant, Gauri returns to her mother, Laxmi, is sold in marriage, but is rescued in time with the help of the saintly Doctor Mahindra who takes her to the safety of his hospital. After a further attempt to live harmoniously with Panchi fails, Gauri goes to Mahindra's new hospital where her baby will be born and where she will begin a new life. The total action symbolises both the historical drama of the peasant's doom of adversity (poverty, nature's implacability, karma, caste, social and economic suffocation), and the qualities of courage and fortitude which provide a moral basis of survival or at least dignified eclipse.

Rigidly underlying the communal and personal situations in The Old Woman and the Cow is a powerful binding folk ethos: the indestructible Hindu order; the irrevocable legislations of heredity; patriarchal and matriarchal mores; power, position and birth which

is enshrined in religious immemorialism but debased into sanctimonious religiosity and a tyranny of hereditary right. Hinduism is shown resolving 'the contradiction of life' with 'resignation' and 'fate' (pp.91-2). The rebellious individual, however right in the pure sense, is generally powerless against 'the general hostility of the patriarchal caste Hindu hierarchy' (p.69). Behind this hostility is a frightening prerogative of rejection, punishment, and banishment.

This communal psychology provides the key to the mainspring of the action—Panchi's loss of community as a result of associating and later living with the Muslims Rafique Chacha and his wife, followed by the banishment of Gauri. Panchi lacks the self-sufficiency to withstand Hindu communal rejection. He becomes unbalanced; irrational and fatalistic obsessions produce in him a guilt complex which has been emotionally conditioned by his renunciation of family and community and by his unjustified ill-treatment of Gauri; further, he is 'overwhelmed by the sudden adolescent fears of fatherhood' (p.103). Thus, in charging Gauri with inauspiciousness and impropriety (standard Hindu devices of rejection), and in sending her away, Panchi reverts completely to sanctuary communalism and he rationalises his position with exactly the same kind of psychological perversity with which the community rationalised its rejection

of him. Thus the main action, founded on an archetype of rejection, ordeal and salvation, gets under way.

Gauri, on the other hand, accepts the trial of rejection, suffering and outcaste loneliness and thereby demonstrates selfhood and moral integrity. During her ordeal she comes to terms with the weaknesses and uncertainties of her nature, while keeping intact all the purifying attributes of the ideal Hindu wife. She emerges as a folk heroine. Her innocence and goodness are endangered by various hypocrites and parasites, but virtue is preserved and conscience, courage and reason triumph. In this archetypal distress-and-rescue situation Mahindra, who 'seemed like a God' (p.163), is the fair Knight or Vishnu incarnation. He is indeed a god of rationality. He combines the virtues of Hindu asceticism—self-discipline, adherence to principle, abstemiousness (he had never deviated from celibacy since his wife's death)—with the values of the compassionate heart.

When Gauri first encounters Mahindra her sense of identity is least crystallised, and there are superstitious elements in her nature which have yet to be purified. Although she manifests in her devotion to her Goddess, Devi, an important attribute of the folk heroine, her relapses into 'unjudging sentimentality' (p.137) are deviations from the heroine's path of truth. Whereas in the traditional

heroine unquestioning reverence is morally exemplary, in the modern emancipated heroine belief in'the fundamental laws of retribution in the Karmic philosophy' (p.148) is a superstitious obsession. But Gauri proves capable of selfhood: receptive to the revelations of reason, she is initiated by Mahindra into the illuminations of Humanism. In a series of conversational speeches (pp.239-43), Mahindra's doctrine of salvation is revealed as an academic platform of progressive educationalism, internationalism, anti-materialism, and socialist economics. In espousing a fundamental reorientation of such traditional Hindu concepts as dharma, caste, and re-birth, Mahindra is a revolutionary. On the other hand, his anti-materialism and unworldliness are, however revitalised, fundamental Hindu tenets. Thus Anand extols in him a positive synthesis of old and new. Similarly, Gauri is presented as a contemporary who embodies all those qualities of folk heroines, of the goddesses of myth and the humans of fable, which abide. She is the 'Cow' of the novel's title and radiates the cow's holiness, softness, gentleness and submissiveness. She also has innate strength and the heart's virtues—goodness, innocence, devotion, selflessness, charity, sincerity, modesty. She is a modern Mother India.

Clearly Anand intended The Old Woman and the Cow as a folk fable or allegory, in which therapeutic Reason (bearing in mind the novel's desire-image of a doctor

healing a sick world) rescues Virtue and both triumph over the plagues of the lower nature. The parallels suggested between Gauri, the cow, and Sita imply an allegorical intention whereby the author expresses through the heroine the hope that India and India's values will endure through her suffering. The identification of Gauri with Sita is fairly persistently alluded to (for example pp.264,278); and in many ways Sita is Gauri's archetype. In the Ramayana, Rama rejects Sita because she has lived in the household of Ravana (even though she was kept captive against her will and her purity remained unblemished). Panchi (though no Rama) rejects Gauri because she has lived in other households, even though she has remained as chaste and steadfast as Sita. Both heroines radiate conjugal devotion and Gauri, like Sita, is to have her husband's child in exile.

Nevertheless Anand's India is essentially the India of hard facts in the light of which, he suggests, the traditional Hindu cosmic view often seems nonsensical—as is made clear by Gauri's ruminations at the end of the novel:

> For a brief moment, the thought that the earth must open up to rescue her, as it had opened up to receive Sita, came as an echo from the memory of her race. But the ground was hard and solid under her feet and showed no sign of opening up, to prove her innocence. She waved her head to forget Sita and thought of the road to the town. She knew Dr. Mahindra would be there, and this reassured her. (p.284)

Anand's is a different allegory. Thus Rama's nobility and magnanimity of character and his exalted actions are paralleled in Mahindra instead of in Panchi. In this way Anand rearranges the fable to meet the contingencies of his everyday world. However, Mahindra in the long run is an ideal of the author's palemical consciousness rather than of the folk consciousness.

The simplicity which characterises the story is matched by a naivety of style through which Anand endeavours to render peasant idioms of thought and vernacular expressions. While the language is often peppered with raw life, it is also often salted with triteness and careless expression. Moreover, in his portrayal of Mahindra Anand has failed once more to make his intellectual protagonist a figure from real life instead of merely from Anand's private philosophical hemisphere.

Anand's most recent fictional works, The Road (1961) and Death of a Hero[43] (1963), are artistically slight productions. Both are novellas oriented around a specific situation: The Road around the social martyrdom of a group of village untouchables, Death of a Hero around the political martyrdom of a young Kashmiri poet, Maqbool Sherwani. Each plot hinges

43 First written in 1947 and revised in 1961.

on the making, and consequences, of a moral decision about paramount issues. The action of The Road resolves into a question of whether or not the untouchables have the freedom to work in the true sense. Their plight becomes for the free individual a choice between asserting this right or sanctioning evils and inconsistencies within the established order. The action of Death of a Hero is a resolution of Maqbool's choice of freedom on death's terms, an embrace of evil and its physical might with the fire of moral vindication. He is a political agent who returns to his home town which has been held by the Pakistanis since the invasion; eventually he is betrayed, captured and executed. The situation in both novels provoke in the author and his protagonists a strong sense of moral passion, and each produces a hero of the big generous heart who, in both vision and practice, opposes evil and inhumanity and loves his fellow men.

'Generous by nature', Dhooli Singh in The Road, 'was determined to win over everyone in the opposite camp now, with a deliberate largeness of heart.'[44] Maqbool writes in a letter: "this is my philosophy of life—that I love people!"[45] His metaphysical belief that death at its highest point intrinsically furthers life and that life is the ultimate focus of

44 The Road, Bombay, Kutub-Popular, 1961, p.82.
45 Death of a Hero, Bombay, Kutub-Popular, 1963, p.93.

human reverence constitutes a fundamentalist Indian position. This is reinforced by Christian analogy for, like Jesus, Maqbool is betrayed by a former friend, the lawyer Ahmed Shah who has sold his soul to the usurpers; Maqbool's corpse is tied to a 'pole' and his 'scarecrow' body is described as looking 'like that of Jessuh Messiah on the cross' (p.91).

The moral premises underlying both novellas are essentially Gandhian and perhaps are best summed up in the simple statement from The Road: 'Against the frenzy of wrong, there must be no hatred' (p.67). Both stories are episodes of the heart refined down to the pure moral elements of Anand's humanistic philosophy. Although they mark a decline in Anand's achievement as a novelist, they nevertheless testify to his strong consistency of purpose. The Road and Death of a Hero lack the virile life of The Big Heart, but they are faithful to its values.

5 CONCLUSION

It is not surprising that the critical attention which Anand has received revolves largely around the vexed question of the social theory of the novel. This is evident, on the one hand, in the acclaim and sympathetic approval of ideologically-inclined critics such as Philip Henderson and Jack Lindsay, and, on the other hand, in the disparagements which have emanated from a point of view of over-simplified antipathy to the ideologically-inclined novelist. Typical of the strictures levelled against Anand's work—each containing elements of the truth—are the following. Norman Bartlett, for example, claims that Anand's 'revolutionary prejudices swamp his talents as a novelist'.[46] Herbert McArthur says that Coolie and The Village are 'honest and certainly...brutal pictures of political, social and economic turmoil' but 'the characters are ruthlessly exploited for situations and ideas'.[47] And Khushwant Singh argues

46 "Indians Look at India", Books, No.339 Jan-Feb.1962, p.26.

47 "In Search of the Indian Novel", The Massachusetts Review II 1961, p.608.

that Anand's characters are portrayed in 'plain blacks and whites'.[40]

However, it should be clear from the foregoing analysis of Anand's novels that the examination of 'revolutionary prejudices' in his work is by no means an uncomplicated matter; that the alleged incompatibility between a propagandist committed point of view and the novel medium in which it is presented cannot be assumed with glib unreasoned certitude; that Anand has created some characters who are 'convincing' as imagined beings who convey the feeling of what it is like to be an untouchable or coolie or peasant; that his characters are often aligned or opposed, as in drama, in a morally meaningful way, a technique which is not to be confused with the ideological over-simplification or exaggeration which on occasions turns some characters into crudely manipulated symbols of the class struggle; that there are situational contexts where Anand legitimately intends a contrast of flat characters, or uses caricature, to embody a meaning in relief.

Nevertheless it is indeed true that Anand's strengths and limitations are generally those of the committed or sociologically preoccupied novelist. For Anand a socially irrelevant hero would be morally in-

48 "After the Raj", New Statesman, 10 Sept.1960,p.348.

conceivable. His characterisations within the proletarian compass are strong, varied and impassioned, but outside this range they are mostly less deft and often flat, strained, or rhetorical. His novels contain a fund of interesting situation created with immediacy and verve, but on occasions he slants situations deterministically towards an arbitrary political or philosophical thesis. His language and manner can be artistically immature, though his social criticism is usually spirited and challenging. He manifests a real love of man, a powerful admiration for the virtues of the heart, an ideal of rational progress, and a deep contempt for man's inhumanity to man. Partly because of his 'universalist attitude' and social emphasis his strengths tend to be apparent in the presentation of the exterior elements of existence and his limitations in the portrayal of the interior qualities of life.

In many respects Anand's novels are inter-dependent parts of a total accomplishment, of a conceived order, and contain a central pattern of development as D. Riemenschneider has shown in a useful monograph entitled An Ideal of Man in Anand's Novels. Riemenschneider argues that each novel deals with an individual versus society conflict situation in which the central 'problem' is that of 'the individual's self-realization'[49] and in

49 An Ideal of Man in Anand's Novels, Bombay, Kutub-Popular (no date), p.1. This article was first published in Indian Literature, Jan.-March, 1967.

which the central development is seen in the increasing maturity of each subsequent main character. (Unfortunately the logic of his argument is somewhat undermined at the beginning because, like Srinivasa Iyengar and Anniah Gowda, he mistakenly believes Coolie to be Anand's first novel.) It is true that one can point to Anand's development along such specific lines as the increasing stature of the proletarian hero, and an increasing broadening and coherence of humanistic belief, which pave the way for the political myth of salvation. The ideological mouthpiece of the early novels later becomes a protagonist in the action, a character in his own right. Also the novels are experiments in different styles of poetic realism: classical realism in Untouchable and The Big Heart, naturalistic realism in Coolie, intellectual realism in Two Leaves and a Bud, epic realism in the trilogy, romantic realism in Seven Summers, psychological realism in Private Life of an Indian Prince, folk realism in The Old Woman and the Cow and moral realism in The Road and Death of a Hero.

And, finally, of course there is Anand's pioneer place in the development of the Indian novel in English. As we have seen, Untouchable and Coolie represent a notable literary breakthrough in revealing how much previously unexplored raw material was accessible to the writer. Saros Cowasjee correctly sees in this

breakthrough the basis of Anand's 'reputation':

> He is the first Indian writer in English to dispel the myth built around the Indian character: the myth about 'contentment' in the midst of poverty, 'mystical silence', 'spiritual attainments'. In his novels, for the first time the Indian masses have been clearly and intimately described with pitiless realism and deep understanding and the exploiters—whether imperialists or feudalists—savagely denounced.[50]

On the other hand, Across the Black Waters is the only Indian novel of some consequence set entirely outside India and must rank among the reputable English novels of World War I.

Anand can be viewed in the light of an Indian literary development from Chatterjee, Tagore and Prem Chand. Also, he can be viewed in the English context of the Thirties' literary scene, and can be seen to have affinities with the American proletarian realism of Upton Sinclair, Dos Passos, Steinbeck and Sinclair Lewis. William Walsh describes Anand as 'a less humorous Dickens and a more emotional Wells'.[51] When considering the Indian tradition of the novel prior to Untouchable, the Indian adoption of literary realism, and the sociological trends of the Indian novel in recent years, it becomes evident that Anand's place in modern Indian writing is noteworthy.

50 "Mulk Raj Anand: Princes and Prolotarians", p.64.
51 "Nataraja & the Packet of Saffron", Encounter, Oct.1964, p.70.

III SOCIAL TRENDS IN THE INDIAN NOVEL IN ENGLISH SINCE 1940

1 INTRODUCTORY: IN THE STEPS OF ANAND

By the time the post-Independence writers of the new generation were finishing their first novels, Mulk Raj Anand had already explored most of the important social areas which were of interest to the novelist who wished to take modern India as his theme. Although a very small number of socially-oriented novelists writing in English had published fiction prior to 1947 (K.A. Abbas and D.F. Karaka, for instance), the most significant contributions to the social novel by writers junior to Anand occurred in the Fifties and early Sixties. These new novelists had grown up at a time when the Independence movement was in its later and most critical phases. Consequently many of them felt a strong urge to write their version of how India's independence was attained, or to record, on the basis of experience close to them, some dramatic aspects of the struggle which made good fictional material. They tended to take over from where Anand left off in The Sword and the Sickle and to make a study, in novelistic terms, of patriotic

motivation and nationalistic aspiration.

This Independence fiction includes the following titles: Tomorrow is Ours (1943), Cages of Freedom and Other Stories (1952) and Inqilab (1955) by K.A. Abbas, We Never Die (1944) by D.F. Karaka, Leaves in the August Wind (1947) and The Whirlwind (1957) by N.S. Phadke, In Transit (1950) by Venu Chitale, Sorrowing Lies My Land (1955) by Lambert Mascarenhas, Some Inner Fury (1955) by Kamala Markandaya, Train to Pakistan and I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale (1959) by Khushwant Singh, The Dark Dancer (1959) by Balachandra Rajan, Chronicles of Kederam (1961) by K. Nagarajan, and A Bend in the Ganges (1964) by Manohar Malgonkar.

These works vary considerably in quality and scope. The best and most readable are Inqilab, Some Inner Fury, Train to Pakistan and The Dark Dancer. On the other hand Phadke's two novels in particular, and to a slightly lesser extent Tomorrow is Ours and We Never Die, are not well enough written to merit serious attention. Inqilab, In Transit and A Bend in the Ganges are the most ambitious and comprehensive historically. As a novelistic history of the Independence movement from the end of World War I to the end of the Government of India Act of 1935, Inqilab is a valid tribute to the revolutionary spirit. In Transit, set in the same period, is a conscientiously documented saga of an upper-class Maharashtrian joint

family, and is Gandhian in emphasis. Venu Chitale shows how, through three generations of the family, old and new ways of life combined and clashed, and how this was symptomatic of the social revolution that was changing India at large. A Bend in the Ganges is virtually a sequel to Inqilab or The Sword and the Sickle, for in it Malgonkar attempts to recreate the epic story of modern India from 1937 to 1947. Malgonkar contrives a plot which permits him to describe both sweepingly and in detail the main events of the period—civil disobedience, Gandhian non-violence, anti-British terrorism, the Japanese occupation of the Andamans, the clash of ideologies in India, the war in Burma, independence, partition, the communal holocaust. By contrast with these three novels, Train to Pakistan is carefully restricted in scope and intention. It is a Partition novel, set in the Punjab, and the action is confined to the village of Mano Majra on the border of India and West Pakistan. Khushwant Singh's revelation of the tragedy and ghastly horror which accompanied the celebration of Independence provides a concentrated impact which the above historically-structured novels lack; his action—confined to a local set of circumstances and characters—is more dramatic and his savagely appropriate tone is more compelling. Of all the Independence novels, however, Balachandra Rajan's The Dark Dancer is the most complex

in theme and the most sophisticated in style.

Nearly all the Gandhian and independence fiction published in English between 1940 and the mid-fifties can be regarded as constituting a 'progressive' school of writing which, in its literary and social objectives, found its origin in the early work of Mulk Raj Anand. Anand praised In Transit and contributed an appreciative introduction to K.A. Abbas's Rice and Other Stories. He congratulated Abbas for recognising that

> ...this question of the emergence of man from the restraints, inhibitions, codes, conventions and violences [sic] of the old society to the status of an individual integrated in a new community of like individuals...is a very important one for us in India. For we are only just coming through from the long eras of feudal and imperialist suppression, and the fatalism which was consequent upon these, to the recognition of human rights.[1]

In turn Anand's novels had, as K. Nagarajan says, 'a powerful appeal to young and resurgent India'.[2] To S. Menon Marath, Anand was important as 'the first Indian novelist writing in English to portray the Indian peasant'.[3]

In fact Anand's stories about caste, poverty and the peasant way of life comprise the beginning of a

1 Rice and Other Stories, Bombay, Kutub, 1947, p.9.
2 "The development of the Novel in India", Arts and Letters, Vol.23 No.1 1949, p.44.
3 "Three Indian Novelists", p.190.

social trend in the novel which has subsequently become a prominent facet of Indo-English writing. As evidence of this trend the following novels can be commended as modest and interesting achievements: Bhabani Bhattacharya's He Who Rides a Tiger (1954) and S. Menon Marath's The Wound of Spring (1960), which examine the question of untouchability with dramatic insight; Manohar Malgonkar's The Princes (1963), which complements Anand's picture of feudal anachronism in Private Life of an Indian Prince; Bhabani Bhattacharya's So Many Hungers (1947), which is a harrowing account of the Bengal famine, and Kamala Markandaya's A Handful of Rice (1966), which brings up to date Anand's account in Coolie of the economic hardships suffered by the ordinary urban dweller; and such rural novels as Humayun Kabir's Men and Rivers (1945), Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve (1954) and Bhabani Bhattacharya's A Goddess Named Gold (1960), which extend and amplify Anand's pictures of peasant life.

Furthermore, these trends are discernible in a set of social themes which were pioneered in English in the early fiction of Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, and which are common to most of the above-mentioned novelists. These themes include the situation of the common man; conflict between the individual and society, between old traditions and new ambitions; the quest for a meaningful Indian identity; and the impact of the West on Indian life.

Santha Rama Rau's Remember the House (1956), Anand Lall's The House at Adampur (1956), Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column (1961) and Ahmed Ali's Twilight in Delhi (1940) and Ocean of Night (1964) comprise a further group of novels which, as studies of the transition from the old to the new India, are products of nostalgic sensibility. In these novels the social aspects of theme are accordingly more subjective in emphasis and tone than is the case, for instance, in Anand's work. The arranged marriage is a sociological phenomenon which has proved a popular novelistic basis for an examination of the subject of feminine emancipation: Bhabani Bhattacharya's Music for Mohini (1952) and Balachandra Rajan's Too Long in the West (1961) are, respectively, mellow and comic treatments of this theme. Social aspects of the theme of the East-West encounter are dramatised and evaluated in There Lay the City (1942) by D.F. Karaka, A Silence of Desire (1960) and Possession (1963) by Kamala Markandaya, and Combat of Shadows (1962) by Manohar Malgonkar. Like Anand's Two Leaves and a Bud, Combat of Shadows is a story about a tea plantation and depends on a similar formula of colonial and racial conflicts.

At the more general level, regionalism, and communalism are inevitable but important social elements in Indian fiction in English, which does mirror to a surprisingly comprehensive degree the social and ethnic

diversity of India. Thus the novels of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, who is a European married to a Parsi, portray life in modern Delhi. Of sociological interest are her depictions of middle class mores and domestic psychology, which her astute characterisation and her social comedy and satire help to make convincing. The novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya, Humayun Kabir and Sudhin Ghose are set in Calcutta or Bengal; Khushwant Singh's are Sikh novels set in the Punjab; and filtering through the work of Ahmed Ali and Attia Hosain is a tangible Muslim spirit. No novelist's identification with place, however, so saturates his work as does that of R.K. Narayan whose Malgudi is a fictional setting no less real than the Mysore it is founded on. The dilemma of identity, which is a theme common to most Indian novelists writing in English, is specifically related to the psychological functions of place and community as well as to the phenomenon of displacement that has resulted from various cultural tensions.

Each of the main social trends, mentioned above, reflects an aspect of the Indian sense of identity. Moreover, it should be remembered that, although the following discussion of social themes depends on putting novels into categories, most novels which have a prominent social scope, purpose or inspiration tend to reflect several social 'trends' in varying degrees and combinations of importance.

2 INQILAB ZINDABAD

Inqilab Zindabad: Long Live Revolution! This fervent cry echoes throughout Khwaja Ahmad Abbas's demonstratively patriotic fiction. The full title of his first novel—Tomorrow is Ours! A Novel of India to-day (1943) is indicative of its political tone of self-determination and moral commitment to the Leftist cause, and its pleading claim to social relevance and immediacy. The main characters in Tomorrow is Ours are symbols of the cause. The heroine, Parvati, is an idealised idealist who finally fulfils her potentialities as a professional dancer and a social being by devoting her art to the Indian People's Theatre. She performs for the people a dance symbolic of a united India freeing herself from the chains of European bondage, and helping to destroy the 'monster' of Fascism. Her husband Srikant (an English-trained doctor) comes to enlightened terms with his traditional upbringing and at the end of the novel departs for the war in China—'the soul of honour, the essence of that

zealous patriotism that alone could save India from foreign aggression'.[4]

The main minor character is a communist and former imprisoned terrorist, Ajoy Bose, whom Parvati admires—not so much for his arguments—but for his tenacity, perseverance, iron discipline and selflessness. Bose persuades Parvati to abandon classical dancing and dance instead for "the common man". He argues that there is "no point in repeating ad nauseam the formal, age-old mudras and gestures and symbolisms", nor in performing "propaganda for worn-out superstitions...for the reactionary conception" (p.131). Bose's definition of the modern dance, and Parvati's practice of it, symbolise Abbas's concept of the resurgent novel as an anti-traditionalist form. Furthermore, Abbas demonstrates through Parvati his conviction that artistic creativity should spring directly from a sensitive social conscience.

The sociological framework of the action in Tomorrow is Ours is obtrusively summed up in the following passage, which also reveals Abbas's explicit affinity with Anand:

The old culture was decaying, along with other ruins of feudalism, and what passed for the new culture was tinsel and trash discarded by the West and picked up by the

4 Tomorrow is Ours, Delhi, Rajkamal Publications, 1946, p.161. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

awakening East, mistaking it for genuine modernism. The rising tide of industrialism brought in its wake the worst aspects of the profit motive system and, among them, an intensification of the sensuous appetites, a dimming of the aesthetic and artistic values and a cynical disregard of the moral restraints. (p.25)

Parvati experiences how incompatible are social progress and anachronistic tradition when she is rejected by Ramadevi, her mother-in-law. Ramadevi is an inflexible traditionalist:

...she was neither interested in nor did she understand human motives. According to her, life was organized on the basis of a set of traditional imperatives...that had behind them the dual sanction of religious dogma and feudal economy. (p.63)

Caste is of course socially central to Hindu 'religious dogma'. And it is finally because of Parvati's friendly association with the local untouchables (Ramadevi accuses her of polluting the household) that she temporarily separates from Srikant. However, Parvati's observation that untouchability 'is a sin against humanity' (p.63) could not be purified. Although Tomorrow is Ours is now only of interest as an early case-history of the novel of liberation written according to sociological formulae, it is nevertheless understandable that to Indians of the time their country seemed to provide classic verification of Marx's historical thesis.

Inqilab, however, is a considerable more mature work, for in writing it Abbas realised that if he was going to bring the history of the 'Quit India' revolution to life his primary aims had to be imaginative. If he could not make his characters interesting for their own sakes, and select incident accordingly, what was the point of expressing himself in novel form? Actually, what Abbas achieved in Inqilab was a workable compromise between documentary and literary methods. Inqilab is by no means a great novel, but it does competently communicate experiences—particularly a sense of what it might have been like to live in India in the Twenties and early Thirties and to be involved in the political struggle.

The experiences and growth from boyhood into manhood of the main character, Anwar, accommodate the novel's central interests. Abbas permits himself the scope necessary to make Anwar a three-dimensional character and illuminatingly reveals the Muslim influences which shaped his personality. The care the author has taken to make this background identifiable is evident in the opening paragraph of the novel:

> The Maulavi Sahib's venerable beard was a source of never-ending wonder to Anwar. It was long and white, and as the morning breeze blowing from the Jumna played upon it, it assumed the most fantastic shapes. Now it was pointed like the tail of a sparrow, now it was blown about like the wings of a pigeon in flight; at one moment it was peaceful like a sleeping cat, and the next

moment it would be wild like a stray dog feared by all the children of the neighbourhood. It was fun to watch the old scholar struggling with his beard when an unusually strong gust of wind spread it fanwise, for then he would forget to scold the children for not attending to their Quran lessons.[5]

Thus, in his beginnings Anwar is clearly located within the atmosphere and environment of traditional India, the wisdom and tenacious longevity of which is suggested by the Maulavi's 'venerable beard'. Also Abbas intimates in the image of the wind blowing the beard into 'fantastic shapes' the imminence of forces of change which, if progress is to be achieved, will necessitate the adaptation of the old outlook to completely new circumstances. As the polemical hero of the novel, Gandhi symbolises this necessity, while the variable winds of change introduce the structural symbolism of the storm ('The Darkening Sky', 'The Storm Approaches', 'Thunder and Lightning', 'The Storm Bursts') which epitomises the narrative development.[6]

As a young man Anwar finds to his dismay that the Hindu and Muslim communities have become increasingly militant and suspicious of each other. Although his

5 Bombay, Jaico Publishing House, 1958, p.5. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

6 Cp. the political and social significance of the storm imagery in Abbas's "Air-Conditioned", Not All Lies, Delhi, Rajkamal Publications, 1945, pp.35-7.

father, Akbar Ali, strives for Hindu-Muslim unity he is no longer close to his Hindu friends. Nevertheless, the climax of Inqilab reveals that Akbar Ali represents the significant minority of traditionalists in whom venerable wisdom is pliable and responsive to the contemporary situation. When Anwar addresses the Muslim meeting, saying that 'the division in India was not between Hindus and Muslims but between those who wanted to see their country free and those who did not', and accusing the Muslims of "exploiting the name of Islam" to "cloak...cowardice and self-interest", Akbar praises his son's "courage" for speaking "his convictions boldly" (p.341). By contrast Amjal, Akbar's brother, typifies the spirit of violent fanaticism that was to divide India; furious because of Anwar's speech, Amjal maliciously reveals to Anwar that he is not the son of Akbar, but of a Hindu, whereupon Anwar rushes out of Akbar's house. However, Inqilab ends with Anwar returning to Akbar's open arms, a gesture which indicates that unity and love can prevail over division and hate and that true tradition and real progress are not incompatible.

To Abbas, therefore, Anwar is not merely an individual involved in a personal drama of identity. He is also a function of history:

...his personal life, like the lives of many of his countrymen, would be moulded not by an individual will

but by events still in the womb of time and forces as big as history. (p.195)

When Anwar later becomes involved in revolutionary activities, he experiences a 'feeling of participation in history' (p.286). At the documentary level of the novel, Anwar is vital to Abbas's design; accordingly he is a voracious eyewitness and his participation in history is comprehensive.

Thus, as a small boy, Anwar happens to be at the Jallianwala Bagh in 1919 when General Dyer ordered his soldiers to open fire on the trapped crowd. He sees the father of his friend Ratan confront a Colonel, plead for the firing to be stopped, and die a martyr's death—ironically shot through a medal he had been awarded for saving the life of an English officer during the war. By showing how this grim event turned Ratan into a terrorist, 'his eyes ablaze with the cold fury of revenge' (p.171), Abbas demonstrates how use of force by the British ultimately contributed to their defeat.

Through Akbar Ali, Anwar becomes acquainted with prominent Muslim leaders. While still a boy he visits Gandhi and talks to him about Hindu-Muslim discord. This proved to be for Anwar, like millions of his countrymen, the great influence of his life:

Now he knew why they called him Mahatma—a Great Soul. On his face was a look of such suffering, kindness and

pity, as if he personally felt the misery of every single human being. But there was also infinite calm and serenity and the boy's spirits revived as he looked into those gentle eyes. (p.116)

Already feeling moral revulsion for violence and terrorism, Anwar becomes a disciple of non-violence. Accordingly the moral premises underlying Inqilab are essentially Gandhian. Whereas 'Ratan ridiculed the very distinction of means and ends and argued that any means to overthrow tyranny were justified', Anwar defends 'the principle of Non-violence by reminding Ratan that love, and not hate, was the basis of civilized life and that freedom gained through non-violence would be more enduring than that won by anarchy and bloodshed' (p.188). Abbas sides with the latter. Nevertheless the Jallianwala Bagh is 'an eternal bond' (p.208) between Anwar and Ratan.

While still a student Anwar meets and talks with Jawaharlal Nehru, makes nationalistic speeches, and is indirectly involved in Bhagat Singh's demonstration (in a bomb-throwing incident in the National Assembly) that the 'Revolution had arrived':

India would never be the same again—the impact of that one single bomb would shake and change the life of every Indian. (p.211)

Later, as an interpreter and guide to an American journalist, Robert Mills, Anwar witnesses Gandhi's famous

Salt March and is clubbed in a lathi charge when participating in a peaceful demonstration in Bombay. Not only does Abbas contrive Anwar's participation in such events, but he also uses the evangelical American journalist, with his exultant philosophy of Whitmanesque brotherhood, as a vehicle for partriotically commemorating the Independence movement's most heroic achievements.

Actually Abbas's characterisation of Mills is sufficiently convincing and alive to provide cunning justification for rendering authorial sentiments rhetorically through Mills. The following demonstration of the American's irrepressible spiritual extroversion is a neat touch:

> A brief passage from the Parsi scripture followed and then it was the Christian hymn. "Lead, kindly light!" Mills could not resist the temptation to join in the chorus and the nasal American voice rose powerfully above the self-conscious intonation of the Indian hymn-singers. Anwar saw the Mahatma, doubtless intrigued by the unfamiliar voice, open his eyes for a moment and, seeing the big, burly American singing the hymn with his eyes closed, a serene smile appeared on the wizened, spectacled face. (p.258)

Mills' gusto provides an appropriate accompaniment to the dramatic events of Chapter XVII ('Strange Pilgrimage')—the Salt March, an All-India Congress meeting, Nehru's arrest, the Bombay strike, and the lathi charges—all of which Abbas renders and telescopes

with narrative verve. The journalist's impassioned telegrams to his New York paper recapture the momentous spirit of Indian resistance to what Gandhi describes in the novel as British "Exploitation" and a "whole system of government" which "is wrong and oppressive" (p.261). One telegram which begins

> CHRIST WALKS THROUGH DUSTY INDIAN COUNTRYSIDE AS MODERN PONTIUS PILATES ONCE AGAIN CONFRONTED WITH UNCONQUERABLE SOUL FORCE WATCH APPREHENSIVELY FROM THEIR NEW DELHI PALACES... (p.258)

invests Gandhi with a quality of sainthood which is borne out by the image of the Mahatma which Abbas has carefully created, and which—as Mills prophesied when he said "Such goodness can be dangerous...I am again thinking of Christ" (p.263)—was to be borne out by history.

It is artistically appropriate that Abbas chooses to introduce in this chapter a passage which pertains to the title of the novel and crystallises the spirit in which Inqilab was written:

> Like distant thunder it came rumbling from the farthest ranks—the cry of Inqilab Zindabad!...
> In a dozen or more different accents, in every possible pitch and key, chanted like a mantra or roared like a battle cry, the two words held spellbound that vast, mile-long multitude—Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs and Parsees, Gujerati merchants and Maharashtrian mill-workers, fair Pathans from the Frontier and dark Tamilians from the South. Anwar thought of the strange phenomenon of the Arabic "Inqilab" and the Persian "Zindabad" joined

together to provide the Hindustani equivalent of the fighting slogan of workers all over the world: Long Live Revolution! He thought of Bhagat Singh, the gentle revolutionary with the sad eyes, who gave this slogan to the country and would soon give his life! He thought of the thirty-two prisoners in Meerut who were charged with conspiracy to bring about this very "inqilab" which millions of their countrymen were openly, defiantly, proclaiming. He thought of the frail Mahatma who had caused these country-wide convulsions by the ridiculously simple act of picking natural salt off a sea-beach. He thought of what Jawaharlal had written..."live dangerously." Each of them had his own notion of "inqilab"...but they were all agreed on the first step towards revolution: The foreign government must go. (pp.267-8)

The spirit of Indian unity which 'Inqilab Zindabad' symbolises linguistically and as a battle-cry is paralleled at the end of the novel by Anwar's conviction, on discovering himself to be Hindu-born though Muslim in upbringing, that he is 'a strange symbol of unity' (p.348). This epitomises the way in which Abbas, throughout the novel, contrives to make the documentary account and the fictional story complementary; yet, despite the transparency of the contrivance, Inqilab seems to have passion and life enough to sustain it. Moreover the evolution of Anwar's consciousness, of his commitment to the cause of Indian freedom, provides a sound basis for Abbas's main theme, which acknowledges the tragedy of sectarian hatred and confusion of aims preventing the realisation of a common morality, yet fully affirms Life:

Life and struggle! That was the pattern of the future. Now he knew where they were going from here. (p.349)

An historical symbolism of winds of change, darkness and storm similar to Abbas's is also a centrifugal device in N.S Phadke's novels Leaves in the August Wind and The Whirlwind. Originally written in Marathi, Phadke wrote English translations of these works which compel one to observe that, if his English is an accurate reflection of the Marathi, the originals are crudely conceived and, in parts, badly written. The 'August Wind' in the title of the first of these novels refers to the Quit India resolution of the All India Congress Committee, held in Bombay on the 7th August 1942, and subsequent events—the arrest of Gandhi, demonstrations, sedition etc. Leaves in the August Wind was intended, thematically, to show that true marriage is a union of hearts and ideologies, and polemically, as Phadke explains,

...to show that a novel which embodies the true political aspirations of the people and depicts their struggle against foreign domination is bound to be suppressed and proscribed by the Government.[7]

If Leaves in the August Wind is not successful at the literary level, it was proved to be progressive

7 Leaves in the August Wind, Bombay, Hind Kitabs, 1947, p.10.

'purposeful'[8] writing at the polemical level, however, for the book was banned and Phadke appealed to the High Court of Bombay, which made a contribution to literary criticism by defining 'reportage' as 'a representation of facts as they are observed in real life'.[9]

Again in The Whirlwind the theme is implicit in the obvious symbolism of the title. In this novel Phadke maintains, by dramatic implication, that total non-violence as a means to Independence was impossible granted the nature of man and the Indian situation. Eventually Shyam, the hero, is morally forced to commit an act of violence: he kills a police officer, a tyrannical homicidal brute, who has assaulted Shyam's father and sister. Phadke exonerates the murder as a necessary act of war. Shyam, however, is essentially a believer in non-violence. Towards the end of the novel, when Congress rule has become established, Shyam warns his compatriots of the Undergrounds that their work is finished and that they should not allow themselves to become politically conceited and arrogant because of their past heroism:

> Nature has her own inexorable laws and her seasons. Our work was like a whirlwind. Will it do if the whirlwind decides to blow endlessly? It must stop blowing, and give place to rains....Crops must grow.

8 Cp. K.A. Abbas, Not All Lies, p.10, where purposeful writing is defined as propaganda which effects social reform.

9 Leaves in the August Wind, p.15.

There must come the harvest....A whirlwind is, of course, necessary. It must blow. But it must also subside when its purpose is over.[10]

The novel ends constructively with Shyam devoting himself to marriage and rural reform.

Reportage in documentary chronicle form describes one class of Independence fiction that historically recreates actual events, people and experiences in a particular Indian locality, and includes novels like In Transit, Chronicles of Kederam and Sorrowing Lies My Land. K. Nagarajan's Chronicles of Kederam, for example, is an account of life in Kederam between 1925 and 1939 and the story—involving politics, the legal profession and a sensational scandal—is based upon the lives of friends and acquaintances of the author.

The background to Sorrowing Lies My Land, on the other hand, is the Goanese political situation from the early Twenties to the Fifties. In this novel Lambert Mascarenhas elegiacally recalls—through a narrator who is crippled, symbolically as well as physically—the suffering and suppression of freedom that resulted from Portuguese rule. However, the main interest of the novel resides in its pictures of family and communal life, and a section of society whose ways of life reflects European influence more demonstrably than else-

10 Bombay, Jaico Publishing House, 1957, p.179.

where in India. Particularly memorable are the narrator's mother, with her devout and zealous Catholicism, and his father, Tob, a virile patriarchal nonconformist whose zest for life contains liberal dashes of wit and wine. Tob is a patriot against whom one of his sons, Roberto, eventually turns informer. The revelation of this provides a moving moment:

Pushing back the tears that rushed to his eyes, my father gripped hard the arms of the chair on which he sat. Then slowly he rose from it and drew himself up to his full height. His aplomb not deserting him, even in the moment of his distress and grief he looked his son full in the face and quoted from the Bible before his Christian inquisitors who had made such a show of their faith:

"O Absalom, my son, o my son!"...

And my brother Roberto, who had stood there, scornful and defiant and full of hatred, cast down his eyes.[11]

The disintegration of the family parallels the plight of Goa, and when Tob dies clutching the soil of his land a tragic phase of history is seen to have reached its zenith. The novel ends with the narrator lamenting the sad fate of his homeland:

Sorrow had arisen out of the passing of an era, an era of good-will, love, affection, dignity and self-respect, making place for a period of selfishness, intolerance, indignity and oppression. Our people were treated during the Republic as human beings,

11 Bombay, Hind Kitabs, 1956, p.218.

respected and honoured. With the Dictatorship in Portugal had come repression, cruelty and debasement. Goa is a prison now, where the inherent rights of human beings are trampled on, where the voice of the people is smothered by hands that are cruel and sadistic. (p.241)

Manohar Malgonkar's novel, A Bend in the Ganges, is a very recent contribution in English to a growing body of modern Indian novels which attempt to re-create India's crisis of nationhood in cinematic novelese. A Bend in the Ganges is an elaborate mixture of the fictional formulae which provided skeletons for Malgonkar's earlier stories. These are: a concept of the novel as entertainment for which the main criteria are plot complexity, continuous external action, sex and violence; a pessimistic view of man; code conflict (non-violence versus violence, Indian versus British, Hindu versus Muslim) and the failure or success of various characters to live up to their respective codes.

The structure of A Bend in the Ganges is based on time and space dimensions of considerable magnitude. The period of cataclysm spanned is 1937 to 1947, and a vast and varied geography provides a concrete visual background to the action. The novel is informally divided into three parts; Chapters One to Thirteen (1937 to 1939), set in the West Punjab; Chapters Fourteen to Twenty-three (1939 to 1942), set in the Andamans; and Chapters Twenty-four to Thirty-six (1942 to 1947), set in various parts of northern India.

An antithetical pair of anti-heroes, the rich terrorist Debi-dayal and the poor pseudo-Gandhian Gian Tekchand, provides the basis of the story—of their interwoven destinies and their relationship with Debi-dayal's sister, Sundari. The personal story complements and actualises the historical reality.

To complete the picture and to objectify the action Malgonkar puts the personal and historical stories in philosophical relief. Like Khushwant Singh in Train to Pakistan, he uses pathetic fallacy to mirror an Indian symbolism of ideas. In Train to Pakistan the blazing summer heat which withers the flowering trees, bakes the earth, and strikes dead sundry villagers is a metaphor of the doom of a disillusioned people; in the putrefying heat trainloads of butchered corpses are bulldozed into pyres and put to the fire; then death by inundation succeeds the ordeal of fire, and the River Sutlej bears death on its bosom like a grotesque crucifixion. Similarly, flood and heat in the opening chapters of A Bend in the Ganges are ambivalent procreative-destructive symbols which anticipate the violence of the story to come.

Further, Malgonkar symbolically visualises his characters in terms of the metaphysical Hindu 'drama of procreation and destruction'; thus in an early key scene Gian is situated in the presence of bronze gods, goddesses and demons:

> For a moment it was he who was the statue, lifeless, ageless, unbreathing, and the images that surrounded him were flowing with life, acting out a hymn of creation, the cycle of life and death, the drama of procreation and destruction.[12]

The climax of the story amid the Partition holocaust, in which violence overcomes violence, is equally symbolic: the Shiva image which protects Tekchand from a bullet aimed at his heart is used by Sundari to beat her mother's murderer to death.

The vision of man as procreator and destroyer created in the likeness of the gods is a fundamental expression of the Indian tragic sense. But tragic feeling tends, in a novel like A Bend in the Ganges, to decompose into negation or futility, cyclic meaninglessness, a self-annihilating biological vision, a 'waste land' tragedy of the impossibility of tragedy in a world which abolishes the noble standard. But this in itself is meaning of an important kind.

While Partition is the subject of only the final chapters of A Bend in the Ganges, the tone of cynicism which pervades the novel is in keeping with the mood of disillusionment which, as a result of both Gandhi's assassination and the Partition tragedy, followed in the wake of the idealism and purpose which the philosophy of

12 Hamish Hamilton, 1964, p.8; cp.pp.332-3.

non-violence so successfully and heroically engendered in the Indian people. K.A. Abbas, for example, in a quite recent story, "The Black Sun", gives expression to a disillusionment and pessimism he had kept out of Inqilab. In "The Black Sun" Lumumba's ghost says to an Indian journalist:

"...You are an Indian with your ancient dynamic philosophy of Righteous Action. How did you become such a hopeless pessimist?"[13]

Of the Indian novels in English which attempt to answer this kind of question with respect to the historical facts of Partition, Train to Pakistan by Khushwant Singh and The Dark Dancer by Balachandra Rajan do so most dramatically, poignantly and honestly, revealing how deeply interrelated the 'dynamic philosophy of Righteous action' and justifiable pessimism were in such circumstances.

13 The Black Sun and Other Stories, Bombay, Jaico Publishing House, 1963, p.28.

3 PARTITIONED HEARTS: KHUSHWANT SINGH AND BALACHANDRA RAJAN

Khushwant Singh's fiction reveals that he is a writer who has been deeply affected by catastrophe and that he has relied largely upon the direct, forthright and energetic methods of realism to convey his reactions to experience. Singh's short stories in The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories and his two novels, Train to Pakistan (1956) and I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale (1959), are clearly the work of a sanguine temperament. Circumstances, however, drastically shaped his outlook, for his decision to become a writer was precipitated by the tragic happenings associated with the Partition of India. 'It was', said Singh, 'a period of disillusionment':

> The beliefs that I had cherished all my life were shattered. I had believed in the innate goodness of the common man. But the division of India had been accompanied by the most savage massacres known in the history of the country...I had believed that we Indians were peace-loving and non-violent; that we were more concerned with matters of the spirit,

while the rest of the world was involved in the pursuit of material things. After the experience of the autumn of 1947, I could no longer subscribe to these views. I became...an angry middle-aged man, who wanted to shout his disenchantment with the world...I decided to try my hand at writing.[14]

The attitude here defined indicates that Khushwant Singh is more than an author of violent narratives, that he is concerned, in fact, with important moral issues. The main theme of his fiction involved consideration of the nature of man and the enigma of human destiny through a juxtaposition of violence with a concept of moral order.

In telling the story of Partition, both Khushwant Singh and Balachandra Rajan tried to re-appraise man and to salvage meaning from inhumanity and moral chaos. Khushwant Singh's disillusionment was part of a widespread anxiety which led to a revaluation of Indian idealism. At the centre of Rajan's The Dark Dancer are the hero's suffering explorations of consciousness; his heart is sensitive, his mind complex; the style, accordingly, is polished, articulate, urbane, subtle, poetic. In Train to Pakistan 'consciousness' by contrast, is confined to what is dramatically necessary (an inevitable concession to realism since most of the

14 From the transcript of a talk for the Australian Broadcasting Commission's Guest of Honour programme, broadcast on the 5th April, 1964.

characters are simple peasants); impact on the moral consciousness is made through the unfolding of events; and Singh's language is as direct, unadorned and uninhibited as the story itself. The elaborate rationalisations of Iqbal—the urban Western-educated intellectual with a communist mission—are exceptional in Train to Pakistan, but they dwindle into stupor and intellectual cowardice, and Khushwant Singh proves in the climax of the novel that it is through love, not intellectualised ideology, that salvation is possible.

In the characterisation of Krishnan in The Dark Dancer Rajan adduces the plight of a modern intellectual who feels isolated from his traditional heritage. However, the example of his wife Kamala, who finds meaning and purpose in her work as a nurse in the midst of carnage, more than mere intellectualising, enables Krishnan to redeem his Indianness. Kamal exemplifies practical goodness and love, and her martyrdom at the hands of an assassin is the culmination of spiritual strength and moral courage. The 'dynamic philosophy of Righteous action', to borrow Abbas's phrase, is similarly asserted at the end of Train to Pakistan when Juggut Singh dies saving the trainload of Muslim refugees; his sacrifice marks the transition whereby an act of love achieves concrete goodness. Thus both novels attempt to reconcile a horror and inhumanity of historical enormity with a singular example of courage, dignity and sacrifice. However, this is a

long way from Khushwant Singh's starting point: the short story.

For some Indian writers the short story has been a vehicle for moral invective. Underlying many stories of communal bestiality is the private cry of utter revulsion and passionate protest. "Revenge", by K.A. Abbas, is an example. In this story Abbas describes an hysteria of hate that causes a once respectable lawyer, Hari Das, to lose his reason, seeking out some Muslim girl who will serve as murderee in revenge for the hideous killing of his daughter. He chooses as a victim an abducted Muslim who has been forced into prostitution. The climax of the story is a ghastly revelation of the blinding mutuality of suffering: as Hari Das is about to stab the girl, he averts 'his eyes in shame' crying "Daughter!"—but does not see that 'where he was going to stab her, there was no breasts...nothing...but two horrible round scars'.[15]

In some of his stories, Khushwant Singh is similarly an exponent of crude impact. Brutality wears many guises—murder, police torture, seduction, rape, mass butchery—but he generally presents such distasteful material objectively. He is not blind to the ameliorating possibilities of life. Thus in the story "The Rape", from The Mark of Vishnu, the

15 Cages of Freedom and Other Stories, Bombay, Hind Kitabs, 1952, p.90.

savage love-making of Dalip Singh, which results in a charge of rape, is complemented by the generous act of the girl concerned who says she was a willing partner; she makes due allowance for human desire, enticing circumstances, and Dalip Singh's genuine remorse. Similarly Juggut Singh's vigorous brutal conquest of Mooran at the beginning of Train to Pakistan is the prelude to the growth in him of a vital and responsible love.

"The Riot" is a short story which exemplified Khushwant Singh's objectivity of technique in writing about communal barbarism; in describing the stupidity, evil and horror of such degrading acts detachment is preserved through irony and satire. Before the riot occurs the town in which the story is set 'lay etherized under the fresh spring twilight', and the disjointed mood of peace conveyed in the Eliotesque image is soon borne out by events which show that for man Spring is a season of hate and fear, the only example of love being provided by the courtship of dogs. Rani, a pariah bitch, is cared for by the household of the Hindu shopkeeper, Ram Jawaya. Every spring she loiters near the stall of the Muslim green grocer, Ramzan, who owns a burly spaniel, Moti. On this occasion, however, Moti is secured by a leash and Rani is forced to seek another lover. But eventually Moti breaks free and attacks his rival outside Ram

Jawaya's shop. The shopkeeper throws a stone at the dogs but unintentionally hits Ramzan, who has come for Moti. The Muslim cries "Murder!" and both he and the Hindu run back to their houses shouting; fear and rumour magnify the incident into a violent skirmish and this results in a rampage of death and the burning of the town. Some months later, when Ram Jawaya is inspecting the ruins of his home, he finds 'Rani with her litter nuzzling into her dried udders' and beside her 'Moti guarding his bastard brood'.[16] The story is an effective parable on the psychology of riot, demonstrating how a trivial or ridiculous incident can spark off fearful ugly imaginings and mass destruction. Meanwhile, dogs copulate and life goes on; it is probably significant that Rani and Moti belong to different dog 'communities'. Singh employs a technique of Swiftean inversion to satirically imply that the animal can be superior to man—at least in the basic matters of life and preservation.

The discrimination and concentration that characterise Khushwant Singh's presentation of his theme in Train to Pakistan are qualities which he developed in writing the sketches in The Mark of Vishnu. These

16 The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories, Saturn Press, 1950, p.76.

short stories are confined to the bare narrative essentials with the result that any rhetorical tendency Singh might have to indulge his personal feelings of disillusionment is severely restricted. Indeed, with the exception of portions of I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, he has always preferred to make his points through concrete analogy or action rather than explanatory statement: this is one of the impressive strengths of Train to Pakistan. Moreover, he wisely restricts himself to those aspects of India and life which he knows best: in the main, the Punjab and the Sikhs. If Khushwant Singh has any pronounced literary affinity it would be with the so-called 'primitivistic' school of writing.

Certainly, sociological observation has provided the initial stimulus for much of Khushwant Singh's work. That he began writing, according to himself, as 'a debunker of Indian pretensions'[17] is evident from The Mark of Vishnu. His stated intention to lampoon 'the anglicised Indian who succeeded the English as the new ruling class'[18] results in the sardonic caricature of a wog—Sir Mohan Lal—in the first story in the volume, "Karma". Lal is ashamed of his traditional wife and regards his country as 'inefficient, dirty, indifferent'. In imitation of the English elite, he cultivates upper class

17 The Guest of Honour talk.
18 ibid.

manners and attitudes and an air of patronage. His insignia of superior breeding are a Saville Row suit (with carnation), perfume, The Times, Scotch, a discursive conversation in English, and a Balliol tie which, in the right company, 'would open up a vista leading to a fairyland of Oxford colleges, masters, dons, tutors, boat-races and rugger-matches'.[19] The illusion is rudely shattered, however, when Sir Mohan, anticipating the luxurious company of English officers in a first-class train compartment, is roughly thrown out onto the platform by two uneducated, drunken Tommies.

Another 'illusion' which Khushwant Singh illustrates ironically is 'Indian religiosity and other worldliness'.[20] Two crisply-narrated stories, "The Mark of Vishnu" and "The Great Difference", are variations on this theme. In "The Mark of Vishnu" Singh demonstrates the superstitious illogicality of the belief that all life is sacred. Gunga Ram, an illerate Brahmin, worships Vishnu and, as part of his religious ritual, provides a saucer of milk each day for a giant cobra. The children of the household insensitively deride the Brahman's belief in the holiness of the cobra; one day they break the cobra's back and, believing it to be dead, take it to school in a box. The box is opened and the cobra, in making its painful escape, confronts Gunga Ram who bows his head in prayer and

19 The Mark of Vishnu, p.15.
20 The Guest of Honour talk.

craves forgiveness. The cobra furiously bits Gunga Ram on the forehead where he had applied a V mark in devotion to Vishnu the preserver.

"The Great Difference" is a satire tinged with mischievous humour. At the World Congress of Faiths in Paris a voluptuous French autograph-huntress approaches a Muslim, a Hindu, and the Sikh narrator. 'Her steatopygous behind', the narrator observes, 'was an invitation to lustfulness forbidden by the laws of man. We signed our names.'[21] Their response to her desire to learn about the tenets and merits of their respective faiths is quite magnanimous. Separate appointments are made so that she can discover the difference between these strange religions. She proves to be a shrewd learner. After keeping the appointments with the Hindu and the Muslim she tells the narrator, "Je comprends bien la difference"; she had applied the infallible test.

Khushwant Sing's stories are lively explicit sketches in which pessimism is balanced by admiration for 'the spirit of adventure' and 'the lust for living'.[22] In Train to Pakistan these qualities are expanded into full flesh-and-blood natural goodness in the character of Juggut Singh. Khushwant Singh's tragic view of life, accordingly, is conceived in terms of a conflict between the rare individual who embodies the spirit of

21 The Mark of Vishnu, p.104.
22 ibid, p.122.

adventure and lust for living, and man in general, whom Singh regards as essentially evil. Thus, in writing Train to Pakistan, Singh conceives Jugga as the moral exception:

...I thought it was time one exploded this myth of the innate goodness in man. There is innate evil in man. And so I just wrote about it, and I did create one character whom I stuffed with the so-called innate goodness of man, and he is the only character which is entirely fiction.[23]

Nevertheless, Juggut Singh is a convincing character partly because of his goodness, and because this quality is a credible manifestation of his rebellious temperament. Even in the turmoil of a collapsing society, goodness is not inconceivable. Sabhrai in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale is another innately good character. She is a devout orthodox Sikh mother —dignified, gentle, spiritually strong. Similarly in The Mark of Vishnu degradation and violence are balanced by affirmations of human dignity and sensitivity in "The Portrait of a Lady" and "Kūsūm". "Kūsūm", a Cinderella story, unpretentiously describes the healthy joy that is released with the emergence of the natural feminine instincts. "The Portrait of a Lady" is a warm character sketch of a grandmother who, in her

23 From the transcript "Indian Accent" by John Thompson, a programme of interviews with Indian writers broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Commission in late 1961.

strength and goodness, points forward to Sabhrai. Singh's short stories, in fact, are introductions to his novels and although they suffer from excessive conciseness they are nevertheless sharp-pointed miniatures of life.

However, from "The Riot" to Train to Pakistan represents a development from a slight story to a forceful novel which deservedly is now quite well known. The action of Train to Pakistan is confined to a few summer weeks (August-September) in 1947 in the village of Mano Majra, situated a mile from the railway bridge that crosses the Sutlej into Pakistan. With very little direct commentary about the history of Partition, the background mass exodus of ten million people, and the colossal accompaniment of violent death, social upheaval and moral anarchy, Khushwant Singh's account of what happens to Mano Majra nevertheless conveys with brutal honesty and fierce concentration the horror, suffering and bestiality of Partition. Singh's historical introduction to the story is limited merely to the two opening paragraphs of the novel where brief biting statements of fact adequately set the general scene:

Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both

shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped.[24]

Apart from this short introduction, a few remarks passed in conversation and Iqbal's sparse but astringent sociological ruminations, the frame of outside reference is restricted with harrowing economy to the penultimate scene in which Hukum Chand (the magistrate and deputy commissioner of the district) recollects three acquaintances who made their tryst with barbaric destiny on the 15th August, Independence Day. There was Prem Singh who had gone to Lahore to retrieve his wife's jewellery and was murdered outside a hotel. There was Sundari—returning with her husband to their home following their wedding when a mob stopped their bus, stripped and castrated her husband before her eyes, and then raped her. And there was also Sunder Singh and his family who were stranded without food and drink in an unbearably hot, crowded train, when there was not even urine left to drink; he shot his children and wife and was about to put a bullet through his head when the train began at last to move on. 'He heaved out the corpses...and came along to India' (p.156).

These three accounts are honed with a savage irony that is the only kind of barrier the author erects between himself and the appalling inhumanity he is

24 Four Square Books, 1961, p.5. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

describing. The atrocious detail is starkly clear, and these three brief episodes convey India's nightmare holocaust far more effectively than pages of full-blown description. The excruciating moral revulsion of the second and third sketches is almost unquotable. In the first, however, some of the revulsion is absorbed by the descriptive tone which, in other non-violent circumstances, would have been merely satirical or caricaturing:

He made his tryst at Faletti's Hotel where European sahibs used to flirt with each other's wives. It is next door to the Punjab Assembly building where Pakistani parliamentarians talked democracy and made laws. Prem Singh whiled away time drinking beer and offering it to the Englishmen staying in the hotel. Over the privet hedge a dozen heads with fez caps and Pathan turbans waited for him. He drank more beer and forced it on his English friends and on the orchestra. His dates across the hedge waited patiently. The Englishmen drank a lot of beer and whisky and said Prem Singh was a grand chap. But it was late for dinner so they said "Goodnight Mr....Did not catch your name. Yes, of course, Mr. Singh...."..."Nice old Wog. Can hold his drink too," they said in the dining room. Even the orchestra had more beer than ever before. "What would you like us to play, sir?" asked Mendoza the Goan band leader...Prem Singh did not know the name of any European piece of music. He thought hard. He remembered one of the Englishmen had asked for something which sounded like "bananas". "Bananas," said Prem Singh. "'We'll Have No Bananas Today.' Yes, sir." Mendoza, De Mello, De Silva, De Saram and Gomes strummed "Bananas". Prem Singh walked across the lawn to the gate. His dates also moved along the hedge to the gate. The band saw Prem Singh leave so they switched to "God Save the King". (pp.154-5)

The three atrocity scenes, superimposed on the narrative as they are immediately before the last scene of the novel, serve to chisel into imperishable relief the moral and humane significance of Juggut Singh's heroic self-sacrifice, in which he dies cutting from across the bridge a rope which would have sliced hundreds of Muslims from the carriage tops onto the knives and guns of the ambush party.

The events leading up to this climax, and the situation in Mano Majra, epitomise the communal catastrophe of Pakistan, while the reactions of various characters in the novel to the happenings around them typify kinds of moral abnegation and compromise perennial in man and not peculiar solely to the India of 1947. In Mano Majra the Sikh and Muslim communities had lived together with brotherly accord for centuries before the nation-wide separitist hatred 'divided Mano Majra into two halves as neatly as a knife cuts through a pat of butter' (p.107). Until the trainloads of corpses arrived at the station, the villagers were not even aware that the British had left and the country had been partitioned. However they had no immunity from the mob psychology of communal fear and prejudice which surrounded them. Each community began looking in the mirror of the other's reflected distortions, and paralleling each other's obsessions. The Muslims prey upon

Rumours of atrocities committed by Sikhs on Muslims ...They had heard of gentlewomen having their veils taken off, being stripped and marched down crowded streets to be raped in the market place. Many had eluded their would-be ravishers by killing themselves. (pp.107-8)

On the other hand,

Sikh refugees had told of women jumping into wells and burning themselves rather than fall into the hands of Muslims. Those who did not commit suicide were paraded naked in the streets, raped in public, and then murdered. (p.108)

Similarly, each community feeds its frenzy on parallel stories of desecration to their holy places.

Khushwant Singh is careful to maintain a balanced view, pointing out that the evil Partition precipitated was in the nature of man and that the socio-religious concept of 'community' served abstract functions like moral exoneration or condemnation. Singh makes it quite clear that on the score of massacres no side was less guilty than another. This balanced view is also evident in other directions. Thus, while the two communities in Mano Majra pledge their mutual distrust, Jugga and the Muslim girl Nooran pledge their love. While at the lowest end of the moral scale are the parasites of Partition who massacre for pleasure and plunder (people like Malli and his dacoits who at the beginning of <u>Train to Pakistan</u> murder the

moneylender of Mano Majra and at the end plan to reap a harvest of Muslim death) at the opposite end of the scale, of course, is Malli's enemy Jugga, without whom Khushwant Singh's view would lack a morally-redeeming aspect. Moreover, the author is careful not to exaggerate his villagers' characters; while they succumb to mass hysteria, genuine moral bewilderment is also an important part of this process; they are manipulated by the authorities who want to create sufficient discord to ensure that the evacuation of the Muslims is desired by both groups, but there are mutual demonstrations of affection and regret when it is time for the Muslims to leave.

With respect to the actual narration, an important example of Khushwant Singh's balanced presentation of events concerns the way in which he introduces news of the atrocities. In that brutal violence provides the basis of the story, the restraint with which Singh approaches this subject, particularly at narrative points when excessive or premature description would be at the expense of real-life expectancies, is commendable. Thus Singh so manipulates the point of view that a gradual and refracted revelation of the atrocities is necessary to coincide with the villagers' growing suspicions; psychologically the main interest is in the impact the violence makes on their minds and also on Hukum Chand. Moreover, sinister suspense is

as much part of the horror as the evidence of butchered corpses and is certainly a key aspect of the psychology of Partition violence.

Firstly, there are ominous hints outside the village circle of awareness: Hukum Chand and the sub-inspector talk about violence in other places from an anti-Muslim point of view, and comment on the necessity of maintaining law and order in their district; Bhola, the tonga driver, tells Iqbal of an alleged atrocity in which Sikhs were supposed to have opened fire on Muslim refugees. Then there are ominous signs when the train schedules, by which the villagers normally kept track of the time, go awry; 'ghost trains went past at odd hours between midnight and dawn, disturbing the dreams of Mano Majra' (p.70). Next, the daylight arrival of a ghost train causes a commotion in the village; there is gossip about sinister activities at the station, and at a meeting of the elders 'uneasiness' results from the mention of a rumour of train 'incidents'. Then soldiers come to buy fuel and kerosene. Shortly afterwards the northern sky is seared with flame and smoke. Then they know:

A soft breeze began to blow towards the village. It brought the smell of burning kerosene, then of wood. And then—a faint acrid smell of searing flesh.

The village was stilled in a deathly silence. No one asked anyone else what the odour was. They all knew. They had known it all the time. The answer was implicit in the fact that the train had come from Pakistan.

That evening, for the first time in the memory of Mano Majra, Imam Baksh's sonorous cry did not rise to the heavens to proclaim the glory of God. (p.76)

But there are further turns of the screw: the details have yet to be supplied. Literary necessity is indistinguishable from moral necessity: the full impact must be felt. So the point of view is shifted to present the scene first-hand through Hukum Chand's recollecting eyes. His emotions are petrified by images he cannot expunge from his consciousness:

He tried to squash them by pressing his fingers into his eyes. The images only went blacker and redder and then came back. There was a man holding his intestines with an expression in his eyes which said: "Look what I have got!" There were women and children huddled in a corner, their eyes dilated with horror, their mouths still open as if their shrieks had just' then become voiceless. (p.77)

And then, finally, the villagers see the horror for themselves: when the rain comes and the river floods mutilated bodies float past their bank; a new train-load of corpses is bulldozed into a mass grave.

Implicit in these accounts is the wracked cry of "Why? Why?" and the sense that death on such a vast inhuman scale defies understanding. Perhaps the

combination of climate and generations of suffering, fatalism and resignation, have something to do with it; however Singh does not indulge in pretentious speculation. What he in fact does is much more important: he realistically recreates a representative situation and then examines through certain characters the kinds of morally crucial decisions men may make in such circumstances.

In this respect Hukum Chand, Iqbal and Juggut Singh are vital to the moral design of Train to Pakistan. The specific situation that gives rise to this design, quite simply, is that Hukum Chand intrigues to link the murder of the moneylender with the communal situation in order to facilitate the evacuation of the Muslims, and then, when it is apparent that their departure will spark off violent reprisals, Chand releases Jugga and Iqbal from jail in the hope that either Jugga, because of his love for Nooran, or Iqbal because of his communist sense of duty, will prevent the locals from attacking the train to Pakistan.

For Hukum Chand the end justifies the means:

> The right and wrong of his instructions did not weigh too heavily on him....There were not many "oughts" in his life. There were just the "is's". He took life as it was. He did not want to recast it or rebel against it. There were processes of history to which human beings contributed willy-nilly. He believed that an individual's conscious effort should be directed to immediate ends like saving life when

endangered, preserving the social structure and honouring its conventions. His immediate problem was to save the Muslim lives. He would do that in any way he could. (p.90)

With such a self-justifying train of thought Chand rightly calculates that Jugga may achieve his ends for him.

However, if Hukum Chand was nothing more than a manipulator of duplicity, his characterisation would be merely stereotyped or facile; he is both more limited and more sensitive than the above description reveals. Thus Singh indicates in an early conversation Chand has with the sub-inspector in which Chand admits "God alone knows what I would have done to these Pakistanis if I were not a government servant" (p.23)—that the magistrate's code of duty provides the limited moral constancy he is capable of. On the other hand, he is morally exhausted by the general holocaust. The geckos swallowing moths on his bedroom ceiling can reconcile him to the inevitable destiny of dying. 'But a trainload of dead was too much for even Hukum Chand's fatalism. He could not square a massacre with a philosophical belief in the inevitability of death' (p.79). He also has a personal interest in saving the Muslim train for he has become attached to a Muslim dancing girl who will be on it.

All in all, however, Hukum Chand's motivation is morally impure. While his code of duty may at times contribute to the general good, it is too impersonal and expedient to be a satisfactory basis for moral action.

Iqbal's moral inadequacy is of a different kind. When he is released from jail he is fully aware of the planned massacre of the departing Muslims and that, on the basis of his ideological commitments, he has a moral obligation to try to stop the slaughter. However, his genuine feeling of impotence is strengthened by an intellectual despair which is no doubt also a reflection of Khushwant Singh's own disillusionment, particularly when Iqbal bitterly comments to himself:

> Where on earth except in India would a man's life depend on whether or not his foreskin had been removed? It would be laughable if it were not tragic. (p.144)

Moreover, Iqbal's elaborate cynical rationalisation that Indian religion and philosophy are 'humbug', 'muddle-headedness masquerading as mysticism' (p.150), may recall the Singh of the short stories who debunks religiosity; but in Iqbal's case rationalisation serves not merely to justify the view that in 'a state of chaos self-preservation is the supreme duty' (p.149), but also to hide a guilty feeling of moral defection. One would be far more inclined to sympathise with Iqbal's unenviable moral crisis, however, were it not for his immature desire to be thought a hero:

If only he could get out to Delhi and to civilisation! He would report on his arrest; the party paper would front-page the news with his photograph: ANGLO-AMERICAN CAPITALIST CONSPIRACY TO CREATE CHAOS (lovely alliteration). COMRADE IQBAL IMPRISONED ON BORDER. It would all go to make him a hero. (p.144)

He can only contemplate self-immolation providing his heroics can be guaranteed public acclamation. Thus, while Jugga acts, Iqbal drinks himself into a sleep, akin to moral paralysis, with whisky and logic.

Iqbal, then, is a moral foil for Jugga and serves to put Jugga's real heroism in true perspective. Jugga, who ironically felt it was his destiny to be a bad character, acts purely from love and therefore from simple moral instinct. In pure heroism duty, imagination, intellect or instinct are not at odds with morality. Thus Juggut Singh proves to be a pure being whereas Hukum Chand and Iqbal are mere men of compromise. Rationalisation, Khushwant Singh appears to say, is the first step towards moral corruption in an intelligent human being.

In order to appreciate the impact Train to Pakistan makes on the reader, and the greater potentialities of fictional presentation over strict reportage, it is interesting to compare the experience of Partition in Singh's novel with a straightforward factual narrative —for example, Balwant Singh Anand's Cruel Interlude,

which is autobiographical and relates the tragic story of a refugee camp and of a convoy, the Sargodha Kafla, in transit to India. Cruel Interlude is a moving objective memorial to a dark moment in history. It has a coherent narrative structure, while a minimal reliance on novelistic procedures has contributed to the recreation of character, scene and dialogue. However, compared with Singh's fictional presentation of the same historical theme it is clear that whereas in Cruel Interlude the author's perspectives—moral and otherwise—emerge in uncoloured overt comment, in Train to Pakistan the perspectives of meaning are forcefully implicit in the dramatic action. A dramatic situation which has been carefully constructed continues to reverberate meanings when overt reportage and comment has long since ceased to do so. Thus Balwant Singh Anand truthfully comments:

> The only redeeming feature was that, in this holocaust, many noble souls had given shelter and protection to persons belonging to other communities and saved them from the fury of their co-religionists at considerable personal risk to themselves.[25]

Juggut Singh enacts all this and more.

25 Cruel Interlude, Asia Publishing House, 1961, p.78.

In I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale Khushwant Singh is again preoccupied by the theme of the antithesis between violence and right moral conduct and the notion that the only redemptive feature of a situation which justifies pessimism, or cynicism, of outlook depends on a single demonstration of personal sacrifice, honesty and moral consistency. The implications of the novel's title are pessimistic. When Sabhrai asks her son, Sher, what India will gain with Independence his answer is lyrically optimistic: "Spring will come to our barren land once more...once more the nightingales will sing".[26] Then, when Sabhrai dies she says, "I shall not hear the nightingales, my son" (p.233), a remark which is Singh's posthumous pessimistic pronouncement about the outcome of Independence. For, although the action of I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale takes place in Amritsar from April 1942 to April 1943, as in Train to Pakistan the meaning of the novel is a function of the author's retrospective disillusionment. The characterisation of Sher, and his father, Buta Singh—the novel's main symbols of the new India—is so condemnatory of the political upstart and the sycophantic administrator, respectively, that there is no doubt the novel's tone is mainly bitter.

The story opens on a note of violence that recalls the religious fanaticism, the hallucination of moral

26 I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, John Calder, 1959, p.79.

self-vindication, which caused and rationalised the Partition atrocities:

"There should be a baptism in blood. We have had enough of target practice." (p.3)

Sher and his companions are training to become anti-British terrorists. Sher has never taken life before but as leader must set an example. This results in the ritual murder of a crane, an act brimming with symbolic overtones. To the group the killing signifies their initiation, in the name of Sikh and country, as missionaries of violence. In terms of the novel's meaning, however, the symbolism is ironically barbarous: instead of shooting a bird of prey—the vulture mockingly beyond the range of Sher's gun—he destroys a harmless trusting crane. That this represents wanton abuse of the sanctity of life principle is further amplified by the crane's emblematic characteristics—holiness, filial devotion, prayerful devoutness, martyrdom.

From this act of slaughter the violent chain of events in which Sher is involved is psychologically precipitated. Jhimma Singh, a local Lambardar and police informer, hears the shooting and deduces the group's subversive intentions. Jhimma's subsequent blackmail of Sher eventually results in the murder of the Lambardar by Sher and his accomplices. Thus the lofty patriotic ideal of violence is reduced to a sordid murder which Sher commits to save his neck. He has

been tested and found wanting: he has neither the strength nor the manhood to cope with the 'conflicting emotions of guilt and pride' (p.6) he felt when he killed the crane and which the same night brought on an insomniac memory of 'the end of its struggle in an attitude of prayer' (p.14). Whatever incipient moral sense he has is destroyed by his desire to be what he is not. On the other hand, when Sher is arrested on suspicion of murder a painful physical humiliation causes him to weep for two days and shatters his noble image of himself. By the time his mother comes to see him he is ready to inform on his comrades. However, because of insufficient evidence, Buta Singh's relationship with the Deputy Commissioner, but more particularly Sabhrai's strength of character, Sher is saved from betraying his friends and himself, and is released. What Sabhrai tells Sher—it came to her in prayer via the Guru—is hardly what he wanted to hear, but is nevertheless his saving grace:

"He said that my son had done wrong. But if he named the people who were with him he would be doing a greater wrong. He was no longer to be regarded as a Sikh and I was not to see his face again." (pp.208-9)

However, before Sher is released Sabhrai becomes mortally ill. But all that concerns Sher is his sudden emergence as a political leader and hero. Full of nauseous bravado, bogus martyrdom and Fascist conceit,

he hides all traces of his moral and physical cowardice. Meanwhile his mother is dying a death which is symbolic of the spiritual self-sacrifice she made to save her son, and which contrasts grimly with his so-called sacrifice for the Indian cause. Thus Sher's symbolic killing of the good and diligent soul when he shoots the crane anticipates his later symbolic matricide. That Sher could become little better than an Indian version of a bloody tyrant like Dyer, the English general responsible for the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre, is suggested by the fact that he has obsessively come to love his dog Dyer whom he had named after the most hated person he could think of. That Sher Singh, given power, will betray the Sikhs and their way of life is a foregone conclusion.

Khushwant Singh can accept, in the case of people like Jhimma Singh, that

> Anyone who has had to live the hard way, literally fighting for survival at every step, doesn't set much store by values like truth, honesty, loyalty, or patriotism. (p.172)

The people he really savages are the moral hypocrites who disguise under these 'values' their dishonesty, disloyalty, mendacity and self-interest. Also Singh is distrustful of the conversion of youth to the idea of political revolution, and condemns the 'religion of the sword' philosophy as a rationalisation of violence.

While the political implications of I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale are cynical, the author's sociological observations—though marred by over-overt and Western-pitched presentation—are arresting and cutting in places. At worst Singh fails to integrate satisfactorily the sociology and the narrative. Sex and violence in the Western novel, of course, are often the product of formula writing. Obviously Khushwant Singh believes that in the Indian novel they are aspects of life which raise moral and sociological issues peculiar to Indian society. In Train to Pakistan, as we have seen, violence signifies moral collapse and there is no suggestion that Singh is deviously indulging in sensationalism. But in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, Singh's presentation of the sexual theme, in contrast to his presentation of the violent theme in the earlier novel, suffers from inadequate unification of action, characterisation and commentary. Sher is revealed as a man attempting to impress his wife, Champak, and thereby to compensate for his 'physical inadequacy' (p.192) by becoming a public figure. Champak is little more than a sexual automaton; she spends her days in auto-erotic nakedness in the bath and before her bedroom mirror (often tantalising the boy servant) and the nights slanting the conversation with her husband to sexual topics in the hope that he will satisfy her before he goes to sleep. (Needless to say she has an affair with Sher's best friend). These scenes are intended to

illustrate Khushwant Singh's sociological contentions that 'absence of privacy' in Indian life causes sex to be brutal or brief or paradoxically inhibited and that consequential repressions seek violent or abnormal outlets:

> Unfulfilled sexual impulses result in an obsession with sex and in many perversions which result from frustration: sadism, masochism, and, most common of all, exhibitionism. (p.43)

Singh's handling of the sexual theme is too mechanical and so he fails to achieve, in this regard, an artistic synthesis of experience and sociological theory. Other instances of overt sociological comment, to be found at the beginning of Chapters IV and IX, are short dissertations on the monsoon and resignation respectively.

Khushwant Singh's aim to see life in sociological and moral perspective, of course, is an important feature of his fiction. Remaining to be discussed, though, is the most central aspect of Singh's novels—namely the Sikh element. We do not fully appreciate Juggut Singh's stature, for instance, unless we are aware that Khushwant Singh conceives Jugga (even if partly unconsciously) in the tradition of Sikh Guru martyrs. Just as Nanak, the poet-prophet of Sikhism, is a symbol of harmony between the Hindu and Muslim communities, so Jugga's love for Mooran, and the salvation of the Muslims he accomplishes, symbolise

the harmony which ought to exist between the Sikh and Muslim communities. In his extraordinary strength Jugga admirably lives up to the Sikh suffix Singh which means lion. He is indeed a virile embodiment of the Punjabi heroic archetype which Khushwant Singh defines in the following way in his book The Sikhs:

> Chronic turbulence produced a restive temperament. At the same time the Punjabi became conscious of being the most important defender of India. He developed a patriotism which was at once bitter towards the invader but benign, and often contemptuous towards his own countrymen, whose fate and fortune depended so much on his courage and fortitude.[27]

The heroic motive that the noblest end for a Sikh was to die for his State, and the idea celebrated by Nanak that action (by contrast with Hindu passivity) is a means to salvation, are implied in Jugga's self-sacrifice. Moreover, it is significant that Jugga went to the temple to receive the blessings of the Sikh religious leader before embarking on his mission. The ideal of self-sacrifice in Govind's verse

> With clasped hands this boon I crave,
> When time it is to end my life
> Let me fall in mighty strife[28]

27 Allen & Unwin, 1953, pp.17-18.
28 ibid., p.33.

is fulfilled in Jugga's death—in the fallible primitive as saint.

In the above respects, then, Jugga is a Sikh code hero, particularly in the way he proves and fulfils his manhood. Sher Singh, accordingly, is a code anti-hero in terms which explicitly relate to Sikh moral concepts and value judgements. It is a pathetic irony that Sher surrounds himself with symbols of militant Sikhdom—'emblems of strength' (p.14; cp. p.192)—which serve merely to highlight his own incapacities. Sher's failure to achieve manhood in the true Sikh sense is continually alluded to. When he weeps after being kicked by the Anglo-Indian sergeant, the Indian head constable whispers: "Be a man. Don't degrade yourself before these white bastards" (p.173). Sher's moral cowardice is thrown into incriminating relief by his mother's spiritual strength which, significantly, was inspired by the picture of the last warrior Guru: '<u>There</u> was a man' (p.204).

But, though <u>I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale</u> lacks a code hero, it has a code heroine in Sabhrai who manifestly "has the dignity of an ancient people behind her" (p.220). The noble verses and spiritual ideals of the <u>Adi Granth</u>, scattered throughout the narrative, are intended to provide not merely insight into the Sikh way of life but also a perspective by which the

characters can be morally evaluated: Sabhrai sympathetically, the others ironically. Sabhrai's spiritual and passive qualities complement Jugga's physical and active attributes, and the two together represent a moral order which, in the fact of violence and evil, is the article of faith with which Khushwant Singh has prevented his disillusionment from perverting his observations of life. Moreover, various humanistic aspects of Sikh belief—for example, the emphasis on love and compassion in the Granth, and the Sikh aversion to excessive asceticism and renunciation—mellow Singh's otherwise tough outlook.

This toughness of attitude is well complemented by Singh's tough style which, in many respects, is reminiscent of Hemingway. Singh's characteristic manner is staccato, concise, terse, spare, cinematic in keeping with the behaviouristic view of life as a complex of stimuli and of art as the rendering of this uncluttered by superimposed comment. Some of Singh's best stylistic effects depend upon vivid accuracy and immediacy of apprehension. Thus, for example, in I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale obsequiousness is summed up in a concrete physical image: 'The manager was still rinsing his hands with invisible soap' (p.37). Also reminiscent of Hemingway is Singh's concept of the code hero in whom honour, courage and endurance are the primary virtues; a person who believes (consciously or unconsciously) that the way he conducts himself in his destruction matters greatly. Juggut

Singh, then, is not merely a simple primitive; he is the 'outdoor' male who is also sensitive and is honest with himself and other people. Like so many Indians of the Forties, he is one of Partition's Lost Generation, but unlike many he comes to heroic terms with reality. As a sexually-virile child of violence living in the wound of time (his father was hanged), he is a striking Indian equivalent of one of Hemingway's heroic types.

Between writers affinities of theme and style are often a matter of chance, and the possibility that Khushwant Singh was influenced by Hemingway remains an interesting speculation. In this matter of influence, however, we can be far more specific in the case of Balachandra Rajan's The Dark Dancer, a novel which is clearly the work of a particularly well-informed literary consciousness. Indeed, the reader would not be extravagant in detecting in The Dark Dancer digested remnants or stylistic echoes of Henry James, James Joyce, William Faulkner, Gerard Manley Hopkins, W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot. In style, construction and imagery, this novel is the product of a calculating literary imagination, not unlike that of James; it is well-made in the sense that the author carefully suggests the novel's major themes on the first page and at appropriate intervals formulates the underlying meaning in the developing concrete symbolism of the dance.

Rajan does not hide from his awareness of artistic procedure behind the walls of fiction, and like Eliot he does not anaesthetise his consciousness of literary tradition during the creative moment. Balachandra Rajan's reputation as a critic was established by the time he turned to writing fiction, and so it is not surprising that The Dark Dancer is to some extent a by-product of his critical maturity.

Thus, for example, Rajan's understanding of T.S. Eliot's understanding of life's quintessential problems is entirely relevant to Rajan's conception of his main character's growth towards self-harmony. A carefully-planted clue—'in the words of Krishnan's favourite poet, "an easy commerce of the old and new" '[29]—establishes the Eliotesque element in Krishnan's identity as a metaphysical voyager in search of the meaning of life. The line Rajan quotes on Krishnan's behalf is from Four Quartets ("Little Gidding", V,220). Six lines earlier Eliot wrote:

> What we call the beginning is often the end
> And to make an end is to make a beginning.
> The end is where we start from.

Like the statements 'In my beginning is my end' and 'In my end is my beginning' which enclose "East Coker", the

29 The Dark Dancer, Heinemann, 1959, p.52.

above lines are frequently re-echoed in Four Quartets:

> ...the end precedes the beginning,
> And the end and the beginning were always
> there
> Before the beginning and after the end.
>
> ("Burnt Norton",V,146-9)

> ...the way forward is the way back.
>
> ("The Dry Salvages",III,130)

> ...the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.
>
> ("Little Gidding", V.240-2)

It is not far-fetched to suggest that, in contemplating the meaning of Krishnan's experiences, Rajan had these lines from Eliot in mind. Their appropriateness is twofold: first, because Eliot's cyclic pattern coincides with the Hindu cyclic view of life and time; second, because when Krishnan returns to India after several alienating years at Cambridge he is literally as well as spiritually returning to his beginning. Chapter One, "Homecoming", is in many respects an elaborate comment on Eliot's remark in "East Coker" (V, 191) that 'Home is where one starts from'. 'Home was his beginning, no more than a point

of departure' (p.5), Krishnan reflects. Because Krishnan has come back 'not to an identity' (p.1) but to an indifferent anonymity, he has in fact returned to the beginning of the quest for identity, selfhood and reality which is characteristic of both Four Quartets and Hinduism. Thus The Dark Dancer opens with Krishnan returning 'to an end which might have been reached from any beginning' (p.1) and closes in the novel's final sentence—'He walked back slowly to the strength of his beginning' (p.313)—with Krishnan uniting being and belonging and becoming in a metaphysical Indian knowledge of self. Which is to say, with Eliot at the end of Four Quartets, 'the fire and the rose are one'.

Although these instances of parallelism of language and theme do not of themselves reveal the extent of Rajan's awareness of Eliot throughout The Dark Dancer, they indicate that Rajan's novel transcends social perspective. However, there is a good reason for discussing The Dark Dancer in the context of social trends in the Indian novel in English, because the basis of Rajan's enlightened mysticism (as in Henry James) are social phenomena rendered with consummate urbanity —in Rajan's case, the divided mind of the 'English-returned' Indian, the alienated personality's attempt to recover traditional values, the individual's involvement in the political destiny of his country,

and the wounding of moral sensibility which resulted from Partition violence. In fact Rajan's writing is most powerful in the chapters which describe Krishnan's and Kamala's experiences of the communal conflict raging near the India-Pakistan border. This section of the narrative is starkly, profoundly, agonisingly moving. In some scenes Rajan makes the reader feel virtually the knife-edge and know the moment of awareness when the 'steel...flashed down as the understanding leaped up' (p.254).

Perhaps this sense of detached intimacy reaches its highest pitch in the claustrophobic scene in which Krishnan, travelling by train to Shantihpur, is locked in a lavatory with a Muslim who is determined to kill him. Krishnan wrests possession of the Muslim's knife, wounding himself in the process, but is unable to kill his enemy, even though he knows that when he loses consciousness from loss of blood he will be murdered. Here the reader feels the imminence of death first as Krishnan knows it and second as the Muslim knows it when the train is ambushed and a Sikh bursts the door down and butchers the Muslim. Krishnan's inability to take life and his attempts to save the Muslim, or at least offer him a fighting chance by giving him back his knife, neatly symbolise in the idea of a vicious circle containing a moral paradox the complexity of human nature. In the train's narrow space Rajan traps the disaster that afflicted India in 1947.

One can see in the presentation of this scene the imaginative strategy which was evident as early as the first page of the novel.

As an example of the way Rajan teloscopes end in beginnings and anticipates the major themes of The Dark Dancer, the novel's opening paragraphs are worth quoting in full:

IT WAS WHERE HE WAS BORN, but where he was born didn't matter. There was nothing in the cracked arid earth to suggest that he belonged to it, or in the river, shrunk away from the banks, that seemed almost to wrench its way through the landscape, startling the brown anger into green. The rail tracks ran forward like an act of will, straining across the flat baked plain, to the first muddle of houses; and then the road forked from it, driving relentlessly through the mantle of dust to an end that might have been reached from any beginning.

In the distance, hazing, and under the white blaze of midday almost venomous, the sheer rock of the temple rose with the houses clustered round it, carved out of the cliff, seeming to thrust it upward, proclaiming the pride and defiance of the earth. He looked at it and felt no emotion flow back. He was born in its shadow but he could have been born anywhere else, anywhere in that parched infinity where the roads narrowed and the gutters wormed among the congested houses, or wherever the scream filtered through the labouring rice fields and the thatch was pierced by the anger of the first cry.

He was coming back but not to an identity, a sense of being rooted, not even to an enmity like that of sun and earth, a struggle against circumstance, a creative confronting, which would open his mind to its depths of repossession. He was coming back to an indifferent sky an anonymous teeming of houses, the road striking forever into a distance which not even the clenched thrust of the temple could make real. (p.1)

Here social and philosophical themes are introduced and deceptively fused. To Krishnan the geographical traditional world to which he has returned seems quite unreal; he feels a lack of emotional connection which is made vibrant in the tension Rajan arouses between Krishnan's vacuity and the concrete presence of the landscape. The cracked brown earth fissured by the river's startling green, by the rail tracks and the dusty road; 'the sheer rock of the temple' beneath the blazing sun; the rice fields and congested houses: this scene is real to the reader if not to Krishnan. Krishnan is looking for a meaning which cannot be found in landscape alone. Rajan's description seems to convey to the reader the physical fact of India and her 'struggle against circumstance', but to Krishnan India cannot be real if he has 'no sense of being rooted', no 'identity'. This estrangement, which the novel is largely about, is for Krishnan both the social consequence of years in the West, and the intellectual realisation that until he experiences 'repossession' at the deepest level of self he will remain alienated from the traditional apprehension of unity in diversity (symbolised by the temple) and will see only what a Western mind has been trained to see—'the muddle'. His Brahminical powers of perception lapsed or rejected, Krishnan sees no meaning in end or beginning, only endless cycles of angry existence; only the constant 'scream' of birth and 'cry' of life which (as the transferred epithet

'labouring' implies) permeates the endless distance. For an Indian who has lost or renounced his traditional understanding of life, the temple cannot make real the cyclic distances of time and space and being.

In the appearance of a 'parched infinity' amid the brown of death and green of life, as in Krishnan's apathetic thirst for the emotion of belonging, Rajan adroitly suggests the inevitable involvement of identity and illusion-reality questions in the 'meaning of life' quest. The quest is further confused by the presence of radically different approaches to the nature of reality. There is the Western active approach symbolised by the British empire's legacy to India—the 'rail tracks' running 'forward like an act of will' from a known beginning to a pre-determined end. And there is the Eastern cycle of infinite possibilities—the 'road' wheeling 'to an end that might have been reached from any beginning'. This imagery suggests the divergence of the Hindu circular concept of time from that of the West, which is linear. This circular concept of experience, affirmed with respect to time in the opening of Four Quartets,[30] underlies in Eliot's poem and Rajan's novel both the cyclic relationship of end and beginning and the reconciliation of past and present, creation and destruction. These ideas are implicit in the dance symbols of both works.

30 'Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.'
("Burnt Norton", I, 1-3.)

Before examining the symbolic level of meaning in The Dark Dancer, however, it is necessary to appreciate how the major themes suggested on the first page are worked out at the dramatic level, particularly in terms of Krishnan's personal relationships. His ambivalent sense of identity and his uncertainty about the direction he wants his life to take are clarified in the main dramatic situation. With Kamala Krishnan commits himself to an Indian approach and solution, with Cynthia Bainbridge (for whom he leaves Kamala for a time) he attempts to commit himself to an approach based on a combination of personal happiness (love in the Western sense) and cultural cohabitation.

Krishnan's marriage to Kamala magnetises the warring elements in his personality. He senses in Kamala's acceptance of him as he is an offering, by example, of a power of acceptance which will enable him to accommodate the negative responses to India—'estrangement' (p.2), 'alien detachment' and 'separation' (p.5)—that he feels as a returned exile. India in its 'anarchy' and 'confusion' (p.5) seems a 'deception', whereas, 'there should have been a feeling of identity' (p.5). This identity is incarnate in Kamala. In permitting the marriage to be 'arranged' in the traditional way, Krishnan knows that he accepts the possibility that he might find freedom, in the

Hindu sense, in conformity; and he knows that Kamala will help him to do so, because she accepts the Hindu role whereby the wife enables the husband to see himself as he is. At first his acceptance of Kamala is a somewhat negative and passive acknowledgement of his ineradicable Indian-ness, though he recognises that 'she would lead him to the precipice of belonging, the point of no return and no escape' (p.19). Later, when his personal contribution to a non-violent anti-British demonstration terminates violently, and he fails to live up to the Indian faith of non-violence which Kamala so serenely radiates, he is only half-way to confirming that his commitments are purely Indian.

However, if we remember that the copy of Paradise Lost in Krishnan's parents' home is always open at the beginning of the ninth book, and that this is the section of the poem in which Milton describes the Fall, it is clear that Rajan has provided us with a strong literary hint that Krishnan has yet to come to terms with time, death, and knowledge of good and evil; and that rebellion against traditional authority and custom is a necessary step towards 'repossession' of Indian identity. The question is: who is to be his Eve of understanding, Kamala or Cynthia? Cynthia is aptly described as the body beautiful. When Krishnan and Cynthia resume their Cambridge acquaintance in India they are instantly attracted to each other.

When Krishnan leaves Kamala to live with Cynthia he believes that his self-fulfilment is dependent on a non-Indian desire factor. Superficially, this is confirmed by the various criticisms of his action, all of which stress the anti-Indian element in his behaviour. But, at the deeper level, Krishnan's rebellion against his traditional background is motivated by a passionate belief that with Cynthia he can achieve fulfilment through personal happiness. However, this belief is founded on the illusion that the island of physical and temporal love is a self-sufficient basis for self-realisation.

Accordingly, Krishnan is forced to realise that the assertion of moral individuality means for an Indian something quite different from what it means for a Westerner:

> His was not the neat, washed country of semi-detached realities where a man could sit comfortably in his slippers, warming his hands in front of his isolation, hearing only the louder quarrels on the other side of the common wall, or the unexpected outbursts on the radio. It was the public square, the streets in front of the temple, the milling multitudes seeking the darshan of saint or political leader; it was the constant struggle to maintain the shape of a personal life against the torrent. He was not in sympathy with such a background, he would spend much of his life trying to protest against it, but he began to realise the extent to which it controlled him, however comprehensive the character of his rebellion. For him the maintenance of his individuality required an increasing pressure of

> self-assertion, whereas for her [Cynthia] it was merely the application of forces which society had long recognised and to some degree respected. She could never understand the force of the pull and the weariness of resisting it, the pitiless vigilance needed to preserve the island intact and serene amidst the collective sea. (p.166)

This is a key statement which not only defines the psychological basis of the theme of East-West cultural confrontation in The Dark Dancer, but is also an illuminating guide, from an Indian point of view, to our understanding of this very important theme in the Indian novel in English.

Kamala's complete acceptance of Krishnan's 'self-assertion', and her non-interference in his decision to leave her, had made him realise that he relied on some 'pretences' to make his adulterous action entirely acceptable to himself. The issue here, of course, is not one of conventional morality but of honesty of motive and truthful clarification of self. 'She made him realise that the only way was through him' (p.56). In making Krishnan realise that he is responsible for his own actions, in 'being herself' the 'pitiless mirror' in which he could see 'a fire of truth that would compel him to understanding' (p.146), Kamala is perfect in her Hindu wifely role. His relationship with Cynthia, however, is an insular involvement in which differences between them are observable and result in 'a negotiated, not instinctive, agreement':

> He was more keenly aware now of the roots of difference and began to wonder if only a crisis exposed them. England....was her background, just as India was his, and the mingling of backgrounds, creative though it might be, also involved an inevitable friction of dissent. (p.164)

Thus Krishnan comes to understand that his relationship with Cynthia cannot sustain the pretence of complete fulfilment, and that through her he was attempting to escape from the deepest Indian side of himself, a part of himself he cannot truly or instinctively share with the deepest side of Cynthia's non-Indian self. Although he had recognised, when he married Kamala, that the central issue of life could be summed up in the proposition 'what one is, is taken and thrust and hunted into a meaning' (p.19), with Cynthia he attempted to define himself through a partly erroneous 'meaning'. This is brought home to him when he takes Cynthia to the temple and his temporary experience of deep tranquillity is terminated when he realises that they cannot receive a joint blessing from the priest. Krishnan is a Brahmin, Cynthia a foreign outcaste. Whereas, at the beginning of the novel, when Krishnan first arrived back in India, the 'temple' had lost its power to make 'distance' 'real' for him, now Krishnan feels that the 'sense of immensity' which seizes him from time to time is given meaningful expression in the temple, 'its architecture

confessing the strength of infinity in the smallness of everyday things';

...in the apparent riot of diversity one felt the presence not of a pattern, but of a unifying force, straining upwards into the spiritual, penetrating down into the sensual, until the borders of division melted away and the two worlds were extensions of each other. (p.169)[31]

It is therefore significant that, when Krishnan takes Cynthia to the temple, he does so hoping this 'force' will restore 'him to some constructive community with the parched land' (pp.169-70). Further, it becomes clear that with the English girl Krishnan experiences the unifying force adequately only at the 'sensual' level. That is why their affair ends and Krishnan returns to Kamala in Shantihpur.

There amid the anarchy Kamala symbolises for Krishnan the temple's unifying force. Now we know why he knew at the time that he married Kamala that there was "no alternative", and that her 'acceptance was the temple pool, the pitiless mirror, the unclouded truth that would yield him that reflection' (p.20). He returns to Kamala having discovered that

31 Cp. "Little Gidding", II, 120-2:
...as the passage now presents no hindrance
To the spirit unappeased and peregrine
Between two worlds become much like each other...

individuality is the knowledge of the truth of oneself, the ability to be oneself, and when she dies he realises this knowledge was her gift to him. As he is Indian and a Brahmin, such knowledge cannot be based on Western notions of individualism and freedom but must be based instead on the Indian acceptance of self which is neither 'the ache to be part of something larger, or the pining for the island's relief' (p.312). With Cynthia he derived ephemeral pleasures from mutual physical possession and thereby learnt, in Eliot's words, that

> In order to possess what you do not possess
> You must go by the way of dispossession.
> In order to arrive at what you are not
> You must go through the way in which you are not.
> ("East Coker", III, 140-3)

With Kamala Krishnan achieves 'repossession' of identity. He returned to the recognition that 'no man is an island' (p.29), that she 'would leave him nothing but himself, no mask, no pretence, no illusion' (p.19), and that

"A man's way to truth is his own. It's in himself and all the teacher can do is to reveal it to him." (p.99)

Their matrimony is truly Hindu: she for God in him.

Thus reunited with Kamala he feels the 'restoring of a law within himself', 'the feeling of a truth suddenly springing to life inside him, of the repossession of an ancient remembrance' (p.235). Repossession is the key word, signifying end in beginning, returning to the opening page of The Dark Dancer and accomplishing what was then unaccomplished: 'a creative confronting, which would open his mind to its depths of repossession' (p.1). Rajan explaining Eliot explains Krishnan:

> When the protagonist decides to set his lands in order, as the bridges of the unreal city fall about him, we are witnessing the recovery of a traditional understanding. The collapse of civilization...is also the death of an illusion, and reality can be born only from inward renewal.[32]

Krishnan destroys his bridge to the West and finds 'inward renewal' at the heart of India's collapse, the Land made Waste by Partition. Kamala's death symbolises the death of the illusion that man is an island and alienation the ultimate reality.

The social and personal themes are one. The Partition line was drawn not only through wheat fields but also through families and hearts (pp.106-7). Both

32 B. Rajan, "The Overwhelming Question" in T.S. Eliot The Man and His Work (edited by Allen Tate), Chatto and Windus, 1967, p.374.

the violent exodus and Kamala's sacrifice reveal the truth that men are 'merged and reborn in the torrent of a common identity' (pp.300-1):

> In the end all men were involved in the death of each other...in the sudden luminosity of a collective death. (p.267)

Rajan recalls Donne while Krishnan scatters Kamala's ashes in the Ganges, aware 'of a common strength born into a personal blessing' (p.301).

Kamala was able to bear the 'reality' that 'human kind' finds tolerable only in small adulterated doses. Hence the saint-like passion of her death as she thrusted herself 'erectly, passionately forward, seeming almost to float against the knife' (p.278); hence her shocking 'beauty, her inwardness suddenly stripped bare...as if for the first time she was meeting her true lover' (p.278). Eliot comes to mind once more:

> ...to apprehend
> The point of intersection of the timeless
> With time, is an occupation for the saint—
> No occupation either, but something given
> And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
> Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.
> ("The Dry Salvages", V, 200-5)

And once again Rajan on Eliot provides the best critical commentary on the significance of Kamala's strength of acceptance:

It is an understanding, a total tolerance, in which evil and perversity are endured for the sake of the insight they ultimately generate. The basis of that insight is not merely self-denial, for self-denial has to assume self-consciousness. It is founded on something more delicate and difficult, namely on the abandonment of the self as the climax and measure of reality.[33]

Kamala resolves the metaphysical mysteries of time and death and the moral paradox of good and evil because no such claims are overtly made for her, because meaning of that order 'can be born only from inward renewal', because

Her death held no reason, only a pitiless logic, the lonely assertion of an unrecognised dignity. (p.28)

And it is because the meaning of The Dark Dancer resides in moral paradox that the novel's symbolism is necessary as a suggestive guarantee that this is meaning of an important universal kind.

Rajan's symbolism of the dance, like the temple, is conceived as a unifying force reconciling life's dualities, in particular identity and estrangement,

33 B. Rajan, "The Unity of the Quartets", in T.S. Eliot A Study of his Writings by Several Hands (Edited by B. Rajan), Dennis Dobson, 1966, pp.86-7.

violence and moral integrity, beginning and end, reality and illusion, East and West, present and past, birth and death, time and eternity. Shiva's dance 'in the circle of flames' (p.18; cp.p.181) and the Nataraja image provide the traditional frame of reference for Rajan's symbolism of the dancer and the dance, and this is meaningfully reinforced by Eliot's imagery of the dance and the circle in Four Quartets and perhaps also by Yeat's image in "Among School Children". The Eliot parallel is in fact insisted upon by quotation, even though the source is unacknowledged:

> He saw the great figure of the Nataraja, one leg arched in that supreme expression of energy...all that infinite power of destruction drawn back into the bronze circle of repose:
>
> "Neither flesh nor fleshless
> "Neither from nor towards, at the still point there the dance is."
>
> Paradox, contradiction, miracle—they were the barriers to which explanation was driven. (p.28)

The lines Rajan quotes are, of course, from "Burnt Norton" (II,62-3).

Like Eliot, Rajan believes that attempts to understand the nature of reality end up confronting a problematic mysticism. Thus tragic social phenomena, like the Partition of India, inevitably force the mind to the mystical precipice. Therefore the

mystical dance poses important questions about evil, human misery, and karma:

> Was it evil alone, the demon, that the foot trampled, or was the macabre energy indifferent, choosing nothing but the pure circle of form? Did the soothing of the image only mean that cruelty lived and one had always to live with it? Was that the condition of a man's life, his karma...? Was that the prison from which no one could escape...?

However, it is also the symbolic function of the Nataraja to imply an ultimate harmony which unifies 'power with tranquility' (p.28), 'Creation and Destruction', 'the two concepts united in one dance' (p.29). Without the Hindu affirmation of ultimate release from the endless cycle of existence the dance would be representative of little more than an existential prison. However, the meaning common to both The Dark Dancer and Four Quartets is that spiritual release is possible because life is paradox, contradiction and miracle. Hence Eliot's chinese jar moves 'perpetually in its stillness' ("Burnt Norton", V, 124-3), while Rajan's Nataraja image as shadow leaps and lunges 'with a demonic concentrated energy' whereas 'the god itself was still, as if the quintessence of motion were repose' (p.229).

In the image of the demonic shadow, then, Balachandra Rajan conveys the suffering and agony of India, the horror of the communal killings. But the complementary image of the god's quintessential repose at the centre of the dark dance of death also conveys a meaning which the complexity of metaphysical, personal and social themes in The Dark Dancer was intended to suggest. From the centre of Shiva's dancing circle of flame Rajan's and Eliot's messages are the same:

> The only hope, or else despair
> Lies in the choice of pyre on pyre—
> To be redeemed from fire by fire.
> ("Little Gidding", IV, 204-6)

4 CASTE AND THE PEASANTRY, SENTIMENT AND SEX

A bulky proportion of Indian novels in English consist of stories which are intended as social or cultural illustrations of Indian life. In this category are novels written primarily to present aspects of the following subjects: caste, poverty, the princes, romantic love Indian style, the arranged marriage, nostalgia for the old India, the place of the Anglo-Indian and the Western in Indian society, the clash of generations, and life in the joint-family. Since many authors deliberately attempt to render social observation entertainingly, it is sometimes difficult for the non-Indian critic to distinguish faithful depictions of Indian life from those manufactured for the popular market. This reservation applies to some of the novels which will be discussed in the present chapter. To be looked at first are novels mainly about caste.

Social or religious aspects of the caste-system are, of course, part of the background of the great majority of Indian novels. However, of novels in English written since Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable, few are so exclusively concerned with the problem of caste. Two novels which do show a comparable concentration of interest in the problem are Bhabani Bhattacharya's He Who Rides a Tiger (1954) and S. Menon Marath's The Wound of Spring (1960). Both novels are specifically intended as attacks on the caste-system, in particular on the moral hypocrisy and social inconsistency with which it is enforced.

In He Who Rides a Tiger Bhattacharya exposes vices of caste by employing a deception which is classically simple yet not all that remote from real experience. The deception is perpetrated by the central character, Kalo, a low-caste blacksmith who successfully poses as a Brahmin holy man. In the early chapters of the novel, Bhattacharya is careful to justify Kalo's deception on irreproachable social and humanitarian grounds. To begin with Kalo is fundamentally good and a warm personality. He had always been a respectable hard-working member of his humble kamar class. He is devoted to his only child, Lekha, who was left motherless at birth. Kali is justifiably proud of her beauty and intelligence.

His hope of 'bringing her up as a girl of gentle birth'[34] is not ludicrous when measured in human terms, though such an aspiration would be regarded by the village elders as a sin against caste. Kalo's first thought is always for Lekha. He would do anything to save her from misery and unhappiness. And so, when conditions became desperate during the brutal Bengal famine of 1943, he tries the caste hoax as a last resort. Bhattacharya's savage irony is more than adequate in convincing the reader that fine moral distinctions, based upon alleged misdemeanours in previous incarnations, make little sense while thousands die of starvation in the streets and profiteers store black-market grain. Of what significance, then, is Kalo's fraud compared with the gigantic fraud of caste and capitalism? Or compared with the degradation Kalo suffered earning a living as a Calcutta parasite, collecting corpses and pimping for brothels? When Kalo discovers that a procuress has kidnapped Lekha and is attempting to force her into prostitution, he rescues her and is determined, for her sake, to revenge himself on society.

Thus, having learnt from grim experience that the low castes have 'got to hit back' (p.77), Kalo perpetrates his fraud. Dressed as a holy man and wearing

34 He Who Rides a Tiger, Angus & Robertson, 1960, p.11. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

the Brahminical sacred thread, he sits devoutly under a banyan tree letting it be known that he had been divinely informed in a dream that Shiva is to rise at that very spot. A gullible expectant crowd gathers to witness the Coming. Using a trick whereby, as a result of periodic watering of the ground, seeds he had planted beforehand swell and push up out of the earth an ancient-looking Shiva image which he had made, Kalo causes the 'miracle' to happen. The crowd proclaim him a saint, money is raised to build a temple dedicated to Shiva on the site of his Coming, and Kalo is installed as the temple priest. Idealistically, Kalo sees himself as avenging the victims of society by causing the upper castes to pollute and damn themselves through worshipping a bogus god he had created and in accepting the blessings of a polluted imposter:

> He was going to be a pillar of society! A pillar created by two seers of grain. Han, that was the way to avenge himself. A smith reincarnated a Brahmin. A convict and harlot-house procurer become a master of a temple, placing the hand of benediction on the bowed heads of pious folks. So had the Wheel of karma turned! (p.86)

The situation is nicely ironical. Those who regard themselves as the spiritual elite will condemn

themselves to perdition believing they are being purified. In a neat reversal of normal roles, the poor exploit the rich. Based on such ironical ideas, He Who Rides a Tiger might have been conceived merely as farce or a comedy-of-manners entertainment. There are two main reasons why this is not the case: first, because Bhabani Bhattacharya writes with a passionate social purpose, and, second, because of the moral antiquities of character and circumstance involved in the portrayal of Kalo.

He Who Rides a Tiger is a moral fantasy whereby not only the central character avenges himself, but also the author's social conscience is somewhat appeased. Justice in the moral imagination is better than no justice at all, and writing a novel is a way of setting a social example. Thus, in principle, Bhattacharya's fictional ironies and satirical observations undermine the hypocrisy of the rich (who spend vast sums enhancing their status and buying spiritual insurance while they ignore but contribute to the suffering of the starving multitudes), and expose the hypocrisy of those who mask their corrupt and immoral natures beneath a great religious affectation of humility.

Fortunately, Bhattacharya's fantasy has relation to real life, not merely because it embodies a recognisable social point of view, but mainly because

important matters of social conscience are worked out in terms of Kalo's predicaments and inner conflicts. The author points out from the start that Kalo's deception is not the uncomplicated solution to his problems that Kalo innocently believes it to be:

> Clutching the sacred thread in his hands he had passed it swiftly over his shoulder and across his bare chest. The daring of that gesture made him tremble. With that gesture he had thrown off the heavy yoke of his past and flouted the three thousand years of his yesterdays. Putting on the sacred thread he made himself rootless.
>
> The terror of the act was followed by a deep sense of release. He had transcended the station that birth and blood had assigned him. Exhilaration and new courage filled him.
>
> He had devised the Coming, aware of the blasphemy he was committing, aware that his abiding faith was ancestral, ingrained. Let him pass a shrine and his folded palms would lift involuntarily to his brow. Prayer came from his heart whenever Lekha had been ill or he had sent the priest at the local temple the customary libation of fruits and sweets and cash. To think that he could be deceitful about a god's image! A man who was setting out to be the god's own priest! But the rebel had been stern and implacable. The rebel was reason and justice, and they had transformed Kalo. The Brahmin masquerade was only a step toward a basic reincarnation. (p.82)

As a humanitarian ideal and as freedom based on human rights, this 'basic reincarnation' is of course a long way off. However, Kalo is an exceptional person because in him the conflict between habit and reason has reached the point where he both envisages

an attainable social reincarnation in this life and positively rebels against a social system which for centuries has effectively habituated people like him not to rebel against it. But Kalo, once apparently transformed, would be exceptional only in being unreal if no inclination to act according to ingrained impulse were left in him, or if he lost entirely his native goodness as a result of living a life based on a lie. Neither is the case, and his character develops in a psychologically plausible way: in enacting the deception he continues to experience an ironically altered, but equally intense, conflict between habit and reason.

At first Kalo sees himself as a social crusader who will expose falsehood with falsehood, and he is delighted by the irony with which he is regarded as 'the man to help stem the tide of scepticism and irreligion which was arising everywhere' (p.99). But as he finds his priestly role so becoming and his 'rare gift of personality' (pp.98-9) is given the chance to flourish, the ancient acceptance tradition has ingrained in him is paradoxically asserted in his gradual identification with the priest's role and in his acquired brahminical sensitivity to the so-called impurities of low-caste. Thus, Bhattacharya exemplifies in Kalo's temporary transfiguration that the blacksmith is a victim of

the irony he has set in motion; the author draws the moral conclusion that even a deception practised for a good end is morally perilous. Hence the novel's aphoristic title. Kalo rides his deception uneasily: 'He rode a lie as if it were a tiger which he could not dismount lest the tiger pounce upon him and eat him up' (p.85).

Besides revealing an extra-ironical level of meaning, Kalo's predicament also makes the novel's appearance-reality theme more applicable to life. On the surface, this theme shows up in the discrepancy between the ostensible moral character signified by the caste badge and the true inner worth of the person who wears it. In addition, the deeper level of Kalo's experience is a subtle variation on this theme. In demonstrating through his lie that caste is often a false appearance and is not necessarily an expression of an individual's real self—as Hinduism claims it is —Kalo becomes infatuated with his adopted 'appearance' and in consequence is partly blinded to the truthful insight which first prompted the deception. Persistently to live a lie, as we know from life as well as literature, promotes moral debility, just as to be truly <u>oneself</u> is a means of approaching truth. Kalo learns to his regret 'that a mask on one's face could eat into one's spirit' (p.123). Having become part of the system he had learnt to hate, he finds his

pose reprehensible when it involves spiritually defrauding the common man whose humanity his deception was originally intended to vindicate. Although in He Who Rides a Tiger Bhattacharya employs a lie to expose the truth about caste as he sees it, for this truth to be fully revealed the lie must be dramatically exposed as well. To that extent Kalo's salvation, whereby he publicly reveals the fraud, is as much the climax of Bhattacharya's social argument as it is the resolution of Kalo's personality.

At any rate Kalo achieves redemption by dismounting the tiger and killing it with the strength which comes from facing reality. While this shows that, socially, his rebellion has revolutionary significance, it also demonstrates that caste prohibitions are psychologically imposed from within as well as socially from without:

> Everything that had happened to the simple kamar of Jharna town had slowly worked into the texture of his being. The jail-house, the harlot-house, the temple. Anguish and shame and exultation. Never again would the smith be despised, mocked, trampled upon. Never again. For the fetters of his mind had been cut. The look in his eyes was clear and undazzled. (p.226)

Because he cut these fetters in such a dramatic public way, his "story will be a legend of freedom, a legend to inspire and awaken" (p.231). This is also

Bhattacharya's authorial hope for his novel: for He Who Rides a Tiger is a real-life fairy tale which makes its sociological point with plain moral circumspection. In The Wound of Spring, by comparison, the point is made with more drama but with little legendary optimism.

S. Menon Marath clearly intends his story to embrace a number of important social themes, of which caste is dramatically (and therefore sociologically) the most central. The author's statement that The Wound of Spring 'is a story of a Nayar family of Malabar in Southern India',[35] and his explanatory references to the matriarchal family system of the tharawad ('homestead'), give some idea of the extent to which localised social setting is an important background to the novel. The Madathil Tharawad into which the central character (Unni) is born symbolises the precarious state of the Nayar joint family at a time when it is tenaciously trying to maintain the old traditions of solidarity, loyalty, subservience, and duty. Menon Marath shows how the old family code is broken up as a result of internal insurgence and changing social patterns: by the uncompromising orthodoxy of the ancient ways and beliefs; by the

35 The Wound of Spring, Dennis Dobson, 1960, p.7.

disintegrating effects of jealousies, rivalries and antagonisms in the absence of strong cohesive leadership; and by the modern generation's desire for independence.

Unni runs away from the tharawad and its strife only to plunge into the midst of anarchy on the large scale. He is captured by a marauding band of Moplahs, who loot and murder in retaliation to Hindu persecution. When the Moplahs are attacked by the army Unni is injured and taken prisoner by the soldiers who assume that he is an enemy. He effects an escape and his life is saved by the Untouchable Kandan family who nurse him back to health. He falls in love with the Untouchable daughter, Cheethu, marries her to her parents' caste-conscious alarm, and returns to the tharawad where he and Cheethu are ostracised by all except Parvathi Amma, Unni's mother. His elder brother, the autocratic Govindan, self-styled head of the tharawad, arranges to have Unni beaten up as a reprisal for his caste defection. Unni resists and is murdered.

Thus the novel's setting and action constantly keep before the reader's attention the tradition versus modernity theme. This theme is the backbone of the novel's social meaning, which is in the main dramatically implied rather than bluntly stated. Both Unni's involvement with the Moplahs and his death draw attention to the problem of violence in society, and indicate some ways in which the problem results from the failure of the past to adjust to the present and from the vested-

interest resistance to social reform. Looked at from this angle the novel's conclusion is gloomily pessimistic as well as said: there is no suggestion that the murderers will be brought to justice, and Unni's mother lapses into a melancholy of traditional fatalism. Instead of some acknowledged recognition of the real social issues underlying Unni's fate, we have Parvathi Amma's belief that Unni's 'death was her crime'. 'She had woven his fate and encompassed his end' (p.221). Her grief is expressed in a morally-conventional way: 'God had chosen to chastise her for her selfishness by taking away the life of her boy' (p.222).

Added to this are the passionate but formal lamentations of Unni's sister:

"Punish me, my God, for my brutal behaviour to my brother last night. I wished for his death. What can I do to wipe out the sin? It has coiled round my heart like a snake. Oh, Unniettan, Unniettan, forgive my selfish, unruly, tongue....What can I do to win your forgiveness, my golden brother? I adored you, I pined for your return, and when you came I cursed your life away...." (p.221)

Stylistically this soliloquy seems misplaced in what purports to be a realistic novel, as if Menon Marath has lapsed into the ritualistic convention of traditional Indian drama. It does indicate, though, that the story is woven around the great traditional themes of fate, defection from the code, and fratricide.

On the other hand, the characterisation of Unni, who is 'obtuse and inturned' (p.17), bears an interesting resemblance to the stereotyped young introspective hero often found in the modern novel: the rebel against home and society, who suffers the 'wound of spring' loss of innocence and renounces his class and the common code in order to marry the girl he loves. But the caste question remains the crux of Menon Marath's conception of Unni's character.

Unni grows into manhood the hard way. He discovers that to come face to face with death, particularly in violent circumstances, is to lose one's innocence. In the battle in which the soldiers attack the Moplahs, a scene strongly reminiscent of Crane's The Red Badge of Courage, Unni's feeling of 'a grief that such destruction should be' (p.72) marks an emerging maturity. Note in the following passages the verbal brushwork, the smoke and blood colouring, the cinematic eye-movement focussing whereby the dead man's mutilations are gradually discovered, all of which are characteristic of Stephen Crane's stylistic presentation of the youthful Henry Fleming's experience of wounds and death in The Red Badge of Courage:

...sunlight poured into a clearing which was choked with the smashed wood of several trees.... Enveloping everything was heavy, static, acrid smoke.

...The blast tore across the forest...Black smoke and dust sought out and filled every cranny...

...there was visible against the olive brown of a tree-trunk a human body. He could only make out one leg, the rest was hidden....There was no clothing on the body. The line of the leg carried his eye to the groin. Where the other leg should have been there was a ruddy mass which jutted out into the brush. Beyond the dark brown hip was the blue and crimson of torn entrails twisted and strewn by the side of the body. The neck stretched out of the shattered torso. The lower part of the face was battered too. Above it the close-shaven crown glistened in the sun. The odour of putrefying flesh was already seeping into the air.

...In the few minutes that his eyes had been trained on that body by his curiosity a scar had been burnt into a part of his mind. It would stay there for the rest of his life...warping the entire shape of his consciousness. (pp.70-1)

The image of a 'youth about his own age with a bad head wound' (p.74) suggests the vulnerability of the young, and the conjunction of 'wound' and 'youth' provides a motif of premature death which anticipates the climax of the novel.

The transition from death to love,which occurs when Unni escapes from his captors and lives for two years with the Untouchable family, introduces the caste theme. Through Unni Manon Marath demonstrates that caste should be evaluated in the light of human experience not inculcated prejudice. It is clear from

Kandan's opinions that one of the main social impediments to caste reform is the Untouchable's resigned acceptance of his place in society and his uncritical respect for his caste superiors. Possibly the peace versus riches theme is romanticised:

...he had found something he had never known at home: peace. He had no wish to leave the narrow contentment of Kandan's household and go out to look for any riches. (p.118)

However, there is no doubt that this portion of Unni's life is morally transforming and provides the basis for the author's primary social comment:

This was the desert of poverty, Unni said to himself, created by the architects of Hindu society. Men and women like Kandan and Cheethu...lived and died in its arid tightness, grubbing for a livelihood. Beyond it lay the temples, the streets, the wells, the bathing pools, the well-filled houses of the caste-Hindus. No path bridged the two worlds. (p.121)

In marrying Cheethu Unni declares that for the first time he acts according to the heart's dictates. It follows, therefore, that one of the main criticisms of caste, from the author's point of view, is that it smothers the heart's unpolluted instincts. Unni's marriage to an Untouchable is not merely a matter of defying convention; to achieve real freedom he must demonstrate to his family (and therefore to society)

that he is not afraid of their wrath. However, society, fate, evil and human folly implacably deny Unni and Cheethu this freedom.

From two novels which examine the difficulty or impossibility of transcending caste, particularly for the lowest orders, it is interesting to turn to a novel about the princely caste. Just as He Who Rides a Tiger and The Wound of Spring belong with Anand's Untouchable, so Manohar Malgonkar's The Princes (1963) can be placed, in terms of subject matter, alongside Anand's Private Life of an Indian Prince. All these novels draw attention to the ways in which the common Hindu code has been a powerful element in Hindu society. In The Princes Malgonkar presents his main characters in the light of the ancient princely code and in terms of their reaction to this code as it degenerates into a political anachronism. Two characters dominate the narrative: the Bedar Maharaja of the imaginary state of Begwad, and his son and heir-apparent, Abhay, who is the narrator. Thus The Princes is in fact two stories, one biographical and the other autobiographical. The characterisation of the Maharaja, a kind of code hero, is a natural culmination of Malgonkar's earlier code characterisations. Distant Drum is described by its author as 'largely the story of the success or failure of the efforts of one of the officers of the Regiment to live up to its code'.[36] This army 'izzat'

36 Distant Drum, Asia Publishing House, 1960, p.1.

is like an ethical mixture of Hemingway and Kipling canons. It is based on the professional soldier's conceptions of honour, integrity and courage, and represents certain 'broad principles of behaviour': responsibility ('we always finish off our tigers'), discipline, loyalty, comradeship.[37] As a hero in an identifiably modern situation—war, communal conflict, post-independence—Garud (the main character) is able to adjust successfully to transition mainly because of these principles. The Maharaja's hereditary princely code is not unlike Garud's, though the final consequences of their honourable commitments are significantly different. When history makes the prince redundant, code and man become incompatible except through immolation, and this incompatibility which Malgonkar presents in heroic and tragic terms is the central subject of the novel. To this extent The Princes is the antithesis of Combat of Shadows. Whereas Winton is a perversion of the archetypal 'clean-limbed, Empire-building Englishman who lived by a code and was just as ready to die for it', admiringly described by Malgonkar in Kanhoni Angrey,[38] the Maharaja complements the anglophile image.

37 ibid., p.1.
38 Asia Publishing House, 1959, p.97.

The Maharaja is the product of a medieval order. An absolutist convinced that to preserve the status quo is his sacred duty, his great illusion is his belief that there will always be a Begwad 'so long as the sun and the moon go round'. He fails to realise, until it is too late for him to accept the new order, that the ancient treaties with the British are not inviolable and that independence will mean the end of the princes' power. He is equally misguided in his belief in the princes' claims on their subjects' loyalty, and in their capacity to appreciate the people's needs and to govern. The prince lives in the past, shrouding his pronouncements in ancient quotations and dreaming of the restoration of lost privileges:

> My father lived in a world of his own—the world of princely India, remote from the twentieth century, encrusted with taboos and clinging with pathetic desperation to a time when our fortunes were at their highest...
>
> It was a world built on make-believe and half-truths and legends...[39]

Despite the pathos, however, the author invests the prince with a stature which, though seen through Abhay's prejudiced eyes, is intended to be impressive.

39 Hamish Hamilton, 1963, p.20.

The prince's arrogance, egoism, inflexibility and fierce pride are balanced by the warmth of his personality—his physical attractiveness and manly laughter—his qualities as a host and a hunter, his 'old-world dignity'. According to Abhay, the 'sterling attributes of his character' are 'his contagious high spirits, his unquestioning pride in the achievements of his ancestors, his abounding, often misplaced kindness, his courage, his devotion to his values, his passionate veneration of his inheritance' (pp.56-7). He is also described as a 'superman born several decades too late to be understood and appreciated by ordinary men and women...a giant caught in the snare of contemporary values but trying to be true to the values of a lost world' (p.57). The prince 'was not a man one could pity' (p.238).

Code heroism characterises the Maharaja's qualities as a marksman and a hunter; he is one of the great shikaris for whom big game hunting is a noble career in itself. However, his courage is not confined to finishing off wounded tigers. When the nationalists occupy the Administrative building he removes their flag single-handed and replaces it with the state flag. 'It was the pitting of sheer force of personality against a hostile crowd' (p.305). He tells the crowd he will remove the flag without dishonouring it:

"A flag is a flag to me, a symbol of honour, and we never subject a flag to any abuse, even an enemy's flag." (p.306)

His dignity and poise win cheers from the crowd.

Malgonkar's presentation of the externals of the princely world reinforces the impression of a vivid personality at its centre. The Princes contains authoritative descriptions of the ceremony, pageantry, religious ritual, festivals, banquets, tiger hunts which were an important part of court life. Splendour, wealth, and extravagance characterise the insignias and paraphernalia of princely status: colourful elaborate dress, weapons, jewellery, gold, silver, perfume, flowers, etc. Colour imagery relating to the court, the natural world, emotional states, and political affiliation contributes to the novel's atmosphere of decadent grandeur. Of the three hundred odd direct references to colour, slightly more than half relate to the Maharaja's personality.

The Maharaja's stature is the epitome of code and serves a dramatic, as well as descriptive, function in giving his fall a magnitude true to his character. When he finally realises the inevitability of the princes' extinction and that they will have no place of power, honour, or prestige, he commits suicide by going unarmed after a wounded tiger. His death represents a refusal to be held responsible

for signing away the powers of his state, and is honourable according to the tenets of family izzat. There is no suggestion that his way out is sordid, melodramatic, or cowardly; unlike his fall, death adds to his stature. He rapturously contemplates dying in the light of an appropriate verse from the Gita:

I am rich and well-born; who else is equal to me? I will sacrifice, I will give; in that I shall rejoice. (p.316)

This, as V.S. Naipaul rightly observes, 'is a medieval concept of tragedy'. 'He does not rage or weep....He was rich and high; he has fallen.'[40] The pathos of the fall is complemented by a heroism of levity and stoic calm in the face of defeat. The Maharaja is also a medieval tragic hero in that his fall can be ascribed to forces other than his own actions or character; such criteria of modern tragedy as pride and defective insight are insignificant as causes of his catastrophe. Abhay elegiacally interprets his father's decline in terms of fate and historical circumstance:

40 An Area of Darkness, p.67.

> I have come to accept that these things are ordained, that what we are given in life are cards dealt out by other hands. You could not deal out the cards yourself. (p.73)

The princes 'were a jest of history' (p.13), 'gasping for breath like fishes left by the floods' (p.298). An imagery of doomed fruition intensifies the sense of inevitability: shrivelling frogs under a burning sun, the fall of ripe mangoes and a mango tree, oysters arranged on a salver.

Naipaul levels against The Princes two basic charges which are particularly worthy of consideration, first that the novel's picture of India is distorted by 'Withdrawal, denial, confusion of values' (p.16); second, that it is puzzlingly inconsistent that the medieval tragedy 'should be so presented to us by the Prince's son' (p.67). That Abhay should come more and more to identify himself with his father's values Naipaul finds unlikely, especially in view of his contacts with modern life; born in 1920, Abhay has been subjected to such emancipating influences as an English-style public school education, university,

a love-affair with an Anglo-Indian, friendship with westerners, war service, the city, and politics. Clearly Naipaul's criticisms necessitate careful consideration of Malgonkar's use of the autobiographical point of view and his characterisation of the narrator. The following general considerations are therefore relevant.

Although Malgonkar's anglophile sympathies are compatible with Abhay's character, the point of view does not assume an identification of outlook and attitude in narrator and author. Abhay is not possessed of uncomplicated omniscience or objectivity as a narrator. If the novel presents a distorted picture, the distortions are legitimate in so far as they are consistent with Abhay's character and consistent with a basic artistic design. Such a design is implicit in the conception of The Princes as a code drama. That the code may be flawed and is not a representative picture of India is beside the point. So, partly, is Naipaul's objection that the cruelty, poverty and degradation of India is 'magicked away', that he nowhere sees the India he knows. Malgonkar's intention was not to describe the cruel India, but, as he makes clear in the prefatory note to The Princes, 'to

personify the thoughts and ideas of a somewhat tightly-knit social group: the one-time ruling princes of India'. His reconstruction of this phenomenon of the old India—notoriously remote from, yet in part responsible for, degradation —is more psychological than sociological. His main concern is the kind of person who was a typical product of the princely system, not the political and social evils of the system. Is it likely, therefore, that even one of the last products of this class would see the real India that Naipaul saw, and that Abhay should be constantly enveloping his world in the dirt outside it? It is to be expected that Abhay's judgements would be affected by sympathies that had been narrowed by his special social position. Naipaul is justified in alluding to Abhay's confusion of values but not in attributing this confusion to Malgonkar.

Just as the portrayal of the Maharaja is convincing partly because of the narrator's emotional involvement with his subject, the record of Abhay's growth, the moulding of his character and attitudes in terms of anachronistic tradition as well as modernity, is credible. Thus, while Abhay can

draw the contrast of 'youth, progressive, righteous' and 'age, reactionary, taboo-ridden' (p.57) between himself and his father, he admits 'I was to become just as proud of our heritage as my father had been' (p.21). Indeed, veneration of the father-image is the primary motivating factor in Abhay's life and is a complex of contradictory emotions. The 'most dominant urge of my childhood', Abhay says, 'was to prove my devotion to my father' but 'there were occasions when I hated him' (p.26).

Abhay's state of mind in adulthood is similarly confused. His harsh treatment of his long-suffering mother, when she abandons her futile purdah existence and elopes with her Muslim lover, is explicable in terms of the conflict in Abhay between the father-image code and enlightened free thinking. Abhay realises his mother is justified and he feels 'shame' and 'disgust' for abusing her:

> My own private life was a morass of guilt. Who was I to talk of sin, of abstract standards of morals? (p.335)

But his resentment stems from the fixated belief that the Maharani has insulted and humiliated his father, thereby betraying the code. In the face of his mother's indifference to the Maharaja's death, Abhay's thoughts cling ambivalently to the father-figure:

> Was this my reward for venerating the father-image I had created in my mind out of a man who was a good rifle shot and who made a fetish of manliness, teaching me never to break down under punishment ...the man who quoted from the scriptures to justify his waywardness in thought or in action? This was his retribution, not mine—the punishment was rightly his. (p.336)

The ambivalence, inconsistency, moral confusion, code obsession inherent in the narrative voice, however, are not proof that The Princes is a bad novel but, on the contrary, that Malgonkar's use of the point of view is psychologically interesting. Furthermore, Abhay has insight sufficient to make the revelation of the tensions in his life credible. He is often aware that he is liable through emotional involvement to distortion and eulogy: 'But there I go, getting carried away whenever I think about my father' (p.121). Similarly, he is capable of objective critical comment; for example, of the economic evils of princely rule:

> ...the people...are ruled by instinct more than reason, sentiment more than logic. No one will be able to convince them that the old order had little to do with the cheapness of food and clothing, that, if anything, the cheapness itself was the major evil of those times....they take an altogether distorted view of progress... (p.68)

Nevertheless, Abhay's 'view of progress' is also 'distorted', as Naipaul demonstrates in respect of Abhay's relationship with the untouchable Kanakchand. Stirred by the memory of his gift to Kanakchand of his own school books, Abhay remarks:

> He was sound as a silver rupee when he began. What made him turn so sour and twisted in later life? (p.49)

As Naipaul rightly claims, the comment distorts the compassion, because the assumption of original soundness cannot be reconciled with the miserable degradation of the Untouchable's existence. The Maharaja's humiliation of Kanakchand at the prize giving, as a result of the discovery that Abhay had written Kanakchand's English essay, is the basis of a similar distortion. Again one must agree with Naipaul when he points to Abhay's confusion in feeling guilt primarily not because of the humiliation but because Kanakchand became a revolutionary. When, in later life, Kanakchand leads a demonstration against the Maharaja who is a man 'already fallen' but 'putting up a brave front' (p.315) Abhay vows to avenge his father. Naipaul comments:

> The stiff upper lip reinforcing a mediaeval conception of degree, public school fairplay stimulating an opposed passion: the confusion is now apparent. It is with more than public school righteousness...that Abhayraj makes a vow. (p.70)

Abhay fulfils the vow by flogging Kanakchand in public on the first anniversary of the Maharaja's death.

While Naipaul is justified in maintaining that this conclusion to the novel 'restores calm of mind to the narrator' 'after the tragedy of the Prince's fall', it does not follow that Malgonkar intends 'to restore it to us' or to present the indecent revenge 'for our approval' (p.71). The end is conceived dramatically in terms of the code theme and, being the final obsessive offering before the altar of the father-image, is consistent with Abhay's character. Because Abhay's 'real self' is 'deeply rooted in the abstract values of the princes'[41] and is a mixture of caste and English gentleman, of the Gita and Kipling's "If", because the 'honour' of the state is as tangible to him as food is to the starving, he rationalises Kanakchand's

41 The Princes, p.185

caste, poverty and humiliations according to the code faith;[42] and when the punishment is symbolically duplicated at the end so is the doctrine--still limited, inflexible, condescending:

He was one of those who would always squeal, one of those unfortunates who had not learned to take their punishment without showing it. (p.359)

Certainly, we should not approve of this. But if a moral message is required, there is no need to seek further than the Maharani's impassioned denunciation of punishment:

"Punishment, punishment! Is that all you can think of? You and your father. Punishment always rebounds; it grows more and more evil. Punishment is such a primitive way of resolving matters." (p.88)

However, despite Abhay's distorting view-point (he applies to Kanakchand such epithets as 'warped', 'poisoned', 'demented', 'snarling') the untouchable's case <u>is</u> put. Kanakchand effectively voices the "insult of poverty" and "the shame of untouchability":

42 ibid., cp.pp.76,78.

"The shame of my mother not being allowed to draw water from the well because it would pollute the supply, of brahmins washing themselves if my father's shadow fell on them, of temples being barred to us, of tea-shops refusing to serve unless I took my own cup and plate..." (pp.288-9)

and the bitter memory of a dustbin scramble for remains of a state wedding feast after a three-hour wait.

The Princes is neither entertainment for its own sake nor at the expense of ethical seriousness. A character novel which is episodic and retrospective in form, it combines the best rather than the worst characteristics of Malgonkar's talent.

As discussion of the above novels has indicated, it is misleading to isolate one sociological phenomenon apart from the Indian hierarchical social structures; numerous factors—such as landlordism, the joint-family, the struggle for political emancipation, the identification of wealth with status—are intrinsically part of the caste system. Similarly, while novels of peasant life offer the reader a picture of a segment of Indian society, this segment is bound to illustrate a social hierarchy of systemised customs and functions which is to be found in

villages throughout India. Further, as the Indian peasantry has lived precariously close to the starvation line it follows that peasant novels are often also concerned specifically with poverty. Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve, discussion of which will be left to the next chapter, is a good example. Also her latest novel, A Handful of Rice, depicts urban poverty, particularly from the point of view of the uprooted peasant seeking his livelihood in the city. So far as the present analysis of social trends is concerned, two examples should suffice: Humayun Kabir's Men and Rivers (1945) as representative of the tradition of the peasant novel, and Bhabani Bhattacharya's So Many Hungers (1947) as an example of the Indian writer's conscience-torn awareness of the poverty problem.

Men and Rivers, like Manik Bannerjee's Bengali novel Boatman of the Padma, portrays village life along the Padma's shifting banks. The way of life in these villages is as traditionally age-old as the occupations of fishing and farming which are the basis of their existence. Fisherman or farmer, the Bengali led his life, and thought about it, according to patterns of experience and behaviour pre-ordained by hundreds of years of close communal living. Without exception novels in English of peasant life corroborate the following observations made by Humayun Kabir in his introduction to an anthology of Bengal poems and stories:

> The farmer in the village is more rooted in his traditional life. He is poor and often lacks the necessities of life. In the present day world, he also is often discontented. One of the major changes which have taken place in the last hundred years or so is the growth of discontent in the countryside. In earlier days, the peasant's attitude was one of acquiesence if not acceptance of his fate. He may have occasionally grumbled but the grumbling itself was half-hearted. He knew his status in society and accepted it for what it was worth. This gave him a dignity which even his social superiors often lacked. It also gave him a philosophy which sought to compensate the hardships of the present life by the promise of better days in a world hereafter or in succeeding lives.
>
> ...Year in and year out, the same routine is followed with hardly any variation. The only break in the monotony of life comes when there is a marriage, a birth or a death or when some daring or foolish man or woman breaks away from traditional things.[43]

In Men and Rivers Kabir lays similar stress on these perennial elements of existence. Whereas Anand's The Village and Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve depict the village in transition—the disintegration of old conventions, beliefs and institutions as a result of British rule and industrialisation[44]—in Men and Rivers Kabir is more exclusively concerned with recording the archetypal character of the peasant's

43 Green and Gold Stories and Poems from Bengal (edited by Humayun Kabir), Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1957, pp.16,18.

44 ibid., see p.28.

experiences. Hence his choice of narrative—a traditional folk tale—is dramatically appropriate for this purpose. From the strange story of a mysterious family feud he poetically extracts the life-like elements and reinforces these with realistic description.

Based on an ancient legend of East Bengal, the narrative concerns two generations of two families. As in Wuthering Heights, a tragic passionate combination of enmity and love entwines the destiny of one family with the other. The novel opens with Nazu and Asgar, who had been close friends in their youth, bitterly antagonistic to each other. There is a hint of some dark secret haunting their past and that this is somehow connected with the fact that Malek (Nazu's son) apparently has no mother. Meanwhile man's never-ending struggle against the elements goes on: as always the fishermen combat their destiny, the Padma. An atmosphere comparable to that which pervades Synge's Riders to the Sea provides a background for Nazu's sudden death during a storm on the river and his mourning mother's death on the Padma's bank. Asgar succeeds Nazu as village headman and accordingly accepts responsibility for ensuring that Malek's inheritance is properly managed until the boy is old enough to look after his own affairs. Malek lives with Asgar's family and is treated like a favourite son. When they lose their property and possessions during a

devastating flood they resettle on a new island which formed near the confluence of the Padma and the sea. Here they prosper. Life is both sad and idyllic: Asgar's wife dies, Malek and Asgar's daughter (Nuru) fall in love. Their future seems bright until Asgar, realising that brother-sister affection has grown into romantic love, reveals the sad background to their lives in order to explain why they cannot marry. Nuru's mother was also Malek's mother. She had been courted by both Nazu and Asgar. She loved Asgar but was forced by her family to marry Nazu. The marriage, however, was not a success. Nazu ill-treated her and eventually she left him and became Asgar's wife. Hence the mysterious enmity between the former friends.

In narrating Men and Rivers Kabir retains some traditional folk devices, for example a dramatic correspondence between prophecy and fate. When, early in the novel Nazu and Asgar each seek an audience with a visiting Faqir, and an altercation takes place, the Faqir shouts a frenzied prophecy. The Faqir seems to belong to the world of ancient tragedy (like the witches in Macbeth) rather than to the modern novel:

"Get back, get back, you fools, for on you is a great calamity, and yet you are fighting among yourselves. The river shall rise and land and water shall be one. For Nazu Mia, I see a stormy evening when the clouds gather and the waters boil. Your best friend shall be your worst enemy and your worst enemy will be your

best friend. Beware, beware when the wind is from the north-east and the cloudy eagle rises in the sky. Asgar and Nazu, Nazu and Asgar—what a strange pattern of love, and hatred and suffering Allah weaves with you!"

The Faqir crumpled up, and fell down in a swoon.[45]

The mystery of this strange pattern of love, hatred and suffering is suspensefully alluded to at various points in the story. Accordingly Asgar's climactic revelation has a dramatic impact commensurate with the brooding suspense which leads up to it as well as with the suffering of the young lovers. Kabir's imitation of the peasants' figurative rustic dialect also contributes to the effectiveness of the folk narrative style as a means of capturing the realities of the peasant way of life. Agrarian imagery is a natural element in peasant speech, for example:

"And you don't know how friendly they were before they quarrelled," said Basir triumphantly. "Like two flowers on one stalk," and he smiled significantly. (p.85)

Just how different the worlds of Indian and British novels are is exemplified by the scene in which Nazu visits the Hakim, the influential village herbalist

45 Men and Rivers, Bombay, Hind Kitabs, 1947, p.34. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

and 'doctor'. The ritual circumlocutions of politeness and protocol, pride and hyperbolical backslapping, which are a prelude to business (the Hakim wants crocodile spleen) are as authentically Indian as the elegant courtesies and pomposities of Jane Austen's world were typical of her age and society. The Hakim offers Nazu his pipe and the following strategies of politeness ensue:

As a mark of good manners he however said, "After you, Hakim Sahib, after you."

"That can't be," said the Hakim. "You are my guest; You must have it first."

Not to be outdone in politeness, Nazu Mia replied, "How can that be, Hakim Sahib? The whole locality honours you. How can I have a smoke before you are satisfied?"

In his heart, Nazu Mia wanted to have the first pull at the hookah more for the honour than for the smoke. He hoped that the Hakim would press him once more. The Hakim did nothing of the kind and began to puff. Somewhat disappointed, Nazu Mia yet kept his composure and began to speak of his recent adventure with the crocodile. Needless to say, he exaggerated the exploit. Where is the man who can resist the temptation of a little harmless self-glorification?

This was the opportunity for which the Hakim had been waiting. "Who has not heard of your prowess, Nazu Mia?" he said....

Nazu Mia felt elated. If his fame had travelled beyond the waters of the Padma, what more could he ask of life? To the Hakim he said, "It is your kindness to say so, Hakim Sahib. You are like the sun whose glory we reflect. Your fame has spread far and wide. Men come to consult you from far regions...."

The Hakim felt he had been sufficiently polite and came straight to the point. (pp.18-9)

As a slice of folk life this passage suggests the clearly defined social structure which has prevailed for centuries. Nazu's exaggeration of the crocodile 'exploit' and the author's rhetorical question which immediately follows indicate both the psychological accuracy of the characterisation (the peasant delight in embroidering fact with imagination is a recognisably universal trait) and the oral origins of the folk authorial tradition. Soon the Hakim realises that his hospitality has been wasted (Nazu had thrown away the crocodile's spleen) and his frustration is described with a nice blend of social irony and psychological realism:

> The disappointment was the keener because he had gone out of his way to please Nazu Mia—a thing he would not have done normally. It suddenly seemed to him presumptuous that Nazu Mia should sit on the farash. He had invited him to sit there only as a matter of form, but surely Nazu Mia should have known better! The Hakim felt he would like to snub Nazu Mia and tell him that his place was the uncovered platform used by rustics and plebians. Yet how could he do so? He had himself asked Nazu Mia to sit on the farash. He might take it amiss if the Hakim now asked him to move away. If it had been an ordinary man, the Hakim would not have cared, but would it be safe to affront a Panchayat? Who knew, some of those local Panchayats were so rude, Nazu Mia might even assault him. (pp.20-1)

Again, in a passage like this, the author relates the character to his social environment with its clearly-

defined hierarchies, codes and concepts of prestige and status.

Fatalism and superstition are two other ingrained qualities of the folk personality which inevitably form part of the traditional storyteller's attitude to life. The 'Unseen that shapes human destiny' is a brooding presence in the novel:

> The call to prayers rang out in the evening sky. The sonorous Arabic sounds hung tremulously in the air and were echoed from the distant fields. A few stragglers hurried from the village at the call and joined in the line of praying men. The small congregation stood up in the gathering darkness and offered their devotion to the Unseen that shapes human destiny. (p.92)

For the Padma fisherman, cursing their fate and doubting the benevolence and compassion of Allah is almost a daily, though deeply felt, exercise.

Other elements in Men and Rivers which derive from the folk culture are the sub-story of Malek's capture by the pirates, and the resignatory epilogue. When Malek, who had been given up for dead, returns safely to Asgar and Nuru verisimilitude is sacrificed for two kinds of traditional formal requirements: the first Kabir's, because he uses Malek's narrative as a kind of formal analogue for his own; the second that of the main characters, because Asgar ensures that Malek tells his story in the ancient manner—that is following a

celebratory feast and in public to an assembled gathering. The power of social decorum is such that Asgar makes himself wait until the formally proper occasion before hearing what happened to his step-son. Thus on the realistic level credulity is strained. Malek's fantastic adventure with the pirates derives from the folk convention of romantic endurance and salvation. In this way Kabir preserves the archetypal cultural pattern as a framework for his account of an ancient way of life which still survives, and presses the novel's point that the experiences of the peasantry are basically perennial.

In the 'Epilogue' Asgar Mia says:

"We are men of the river. We are peasants. We build our homes on sand and the water washes them away. We build again and again, and we till the earth and bring the golden harvest out of the waste land."

And Malek replies:

"I am also a son of the river. I too must build my home on sand. But the old must die before the new can be born. I must go away, Asgar chacha, and who knows, perhaps one day I might return." (p.183)

Extracted from the context of the novel's atmosphere and conventional formality, these speeches seem stilted, artificial, theatrical. Yet the reader tends to accept them in a spirit of willing suspension of disbelief in accepting that Kabir's story reveals that, for these

Padma villagers, the present is as ancient as the past. Their lives and interacting fates are ancient drama.

Men and Rivers, like Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve, shows in dramatic and social terms how man's eternal struggle with natural forces is central to the peasant experience of life, and how this struggle is classically pure and elemental. This is a reiterated theme. Nazu Mia says, prior to his fatal voyage, "men must fight the elements in order to live, and we have fought the Padma all our lives" (p.54). The Padma, in fact, is the equivalent of a central character: the river's moods, actions, atmosphere, behaviour, and elemental life dominate the novel. She is as all-powerful in her bounty as in her destructiveness; she is Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu in one. Against 'the vast desolation' of her waters in flood the 'black spots' of boats are 'a pathetic symbol of man's insignificance before the elemental forces of nature' (p.124). Sorrow and suffering are as permanent as the seasonal rhythms of nature. Against the obliterating violence of these eternal rhythms Men and Rivers offers the moral affirmation of 'infinite pity and sadness and love' (p.174).

However, there is little evidence of infinite pity and love in Bhabani Bhattacharya's So Many Hungers, which is an account of the Bengal famine told particularly from the point of view of the starving peasants who migrated

to Calcutta where they died in the streets. The writing of such a novel could not have been easy. Bhattacharya had, simultaneously, to be objective, to make an emotional impact on the reader, and to prevent his own affronted humanity from subjectively clouding the picture. This was particularly necessary in the rendering of such scenes as that which describes a jackal perched on the thigh of a pregnant woman, tearing at her swollen belly while her screams slash the air.

Bhattacharya poses the problem of human impotence in the face of widespread calamity. So Many Hungers, both as fiction and fact, is more effective than a straight documentary account because it examines the problem from moral and artistic, as well as practical, points of view. One scene in the novel serves as a parable for this: it is the scene on a railway platform in which, at the instigation of a 'stout well-fed man' an artist is set upon by a crazed crowd for sketching a child sucking the breast of its dead mother. The artist had suppressed his affronted humanity in order to "report to India". In the crowd's motivation and their destruction of the drawing the reader discerns not so much compassion as a refusal to see, a denial of the reality, a release of frustration. The battered artist is reduced to the sense of having neglected his duty in not immediately taking care of the child, and he feels

revulsion for the sight he forced himself to endure—he 'seethed with human feeling'—but, as a result, he 'lost his detachment and, with detachment, vision'; 'the dead mother...now died for the second time'.[46]

Obviously a novel like So Many Hungers, has to result from a sense of social purpose. And, indeed, it does tally with Bhattacharya's personal defence of art as a criticism of life and a review of current values, and his concept of the novel as an 'idiom of compassion' which is designed to have a curative effect.[47]

Quite different in tone and social emphasis are those novels of Indian life which nostalgically lament the passing of the old India, or at least of aspects of the old India which are cherished in the memories of some authors and some of their characters. The fiction of Ahmed Ali, Santha Rama Rau, Anand Lall and Attia Hosain can be placed in this category. The authors have in common a sensibility of cultural alienation and loss, and share such sentiments as nostalgia, a love of beauty, emotional involvement with the India of their childhood and their dreams, and a sensitivity to the joys and sorrows of love. Ahmed Ali's Twilight in Delhi, as the title suggests, sets the mood for a dis-

46 So Many Hungers, Bombay, Hind Kitabs, 1947, p.216. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

47 Mumtaz Motiwalla, "The Indian Writer Today", The Indian P.E.N., Vol.XX No.10 1 Oct.1954, p.153.

cussion of these authors.

Referring to Twilight in Delhi, Ahmed Ali writes: 'My purpose was to depict a phase of our national life and the decay of a whole culture'.[48] His method of achieving this purpose is to focus attention primarily on one middle-class Muslim family, that of Mir Nihal the central character, and, by following the thoughts, feelings and doings of the family and of Mir Nihal in particular, to present a picture of life in Delhi during the second decade of the twentieth century. At the beginning of the novel Mir Nihal is near the end of his prime as a connoisseur of the art of living and the pleasures of civilization. During the course of the narrative the decay of Delhi and the disintegration of Islamic culture in the city are paralleled by Mir Nihal's disillusionment and physical decline, and the novel ends with the broken patriarch on his death-bed.

In relating the story Ali uses a kind of verbal roving camera which focuses on a succession of short scenes or slices of life (ranging from the pleasures of pigeon flying and courtesans to domestic responsibilities with regard to arranging marriages and supporting relatives) and records the melancholy passing of time. He also soaks the narrative in a highly self-conscious

48 Introduction, Twilight in Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1966, p.viii. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

mood which contributes to the novel's elegiac theme. 'Twilight' and 'darkness' are the key tonal terms, and a language of rhetoric, emotion and imagery derived from Persian poetic tradition is used to evoke atmosphere and to induce a kind of anaesthetic longing for a sumptuous peace, a desirable death. Delhi 'is the symbol of Life and Death' (p.2). In accents of reverie, the author asks 'Where is Shah Jahan...where is Bahadur Shah, the tragic poet and the last of the noble line?', and answers 'Gone they are, gone and dead beneath the all-embracing earth' (p.2). We can deduce that Twilight in Delhi is to be a 'tale' of Delhi's 'mutability', of the 'ruin' that 'came upon its culture and its purity...its chastity and form' (p.3).

The sentiments of the Muslim poets are blended with echoes from T.S. Eliot. Ali's sentence, 'The nymphs have all gone to sleep, and the lovers have departed' (p.4), recalls Eliot's refrain 'The nymphs are departed' in Part III of The Waste Land. Ali's Delhi recalls 'the twilight kingdom' of "The Hollow Men". And both the Waste Land 'Game of Chess' and the streets in Prufrock 'that follow like a tedious argument / Of insidious intent' are suggested by the following passage:

> Only narrow by-lanes and alleys, insidious as a game of chess, intersect the streets and the city like the deep gutters which line them on either side, and grow narrower as you plunge into them, giving a feeling of suffocation and death, until they terminate at

some house front or meet another net of by-lanes as insidious as before. (p.4)

The appropriateness of the Eliot echoes is, of course, as much thematic as atmospheric in that Ali's Indian theme of the decay of tradition and the profusion of spiritual and social anarchy complements Eliot's similar European theme.

The thematic and stylistic melancholy of Twilight in Delhi pervades every page of the novel—sometimes artificially, sometimes evocatively—and is especially evident in Ali's portrayals of the Muslim paradisal instinct. Asghar (Mir Nihal's son) wants complete emancipation in matters of the heart, and the clash of generations which results and the ache of familial affection which is brought to the surface are quite credible. In feudal fashion, Mir Nihal keeps a mistress of whom he is very fond. The 'inhibitions which grow in the repressed lives of Indian women like cobwebs and mushrooms' (p.40) are sublimated in the domestic duties and philosophies of the zenanna. In each of these situations the erotic pulse of the paradisal instinct beats like a soft drum and tires the nerves with ecstacy and grieving.

The domes of the city mosques 'spread out like the white breasts of a woman bared...to catch the starlight' (p.1). Asghar looks up at the stars and the Milky Way in his dreams:

...one by one the stars seem to move and begin to dance, and out of every star a beautiful maiden is born, and the starry maidens dance around him. Their glowing bodies are shapely and naked. (p.14)

He thought how the Prophet Mohammad had walked on the Milky Way for the eternal moment in Paradise...(p.15)

Love is a malady: 'To be loved is sweet, he thought, whereas to love is full of sorrow and grief and pain' (p.23). Asghar's neighbour, Hameed, was so afflicted by youthful frustrated love that he went mad at the age of eighteen.

For Mir Nihal the death of Eros coincides with the death of his mistress, the massacre of most of his pigeons (symbols of paradisal aspiration), and the rape of Delhi by the British. Social and political comment in Twilight in Delhi is largely centred in Mir Nihal's nostalgic consciousness. As he watches the procession of the English King through the streets of Delhi in 1911, the following 'painful thoughts' 'swarmed upon him':

Right in front of him was the Red Fort built long ago by Shah Jahan, the greatest of artist in mortar and stone, but which was now being trampled by the ruthless feet of an alien race. On his right, beyond the city wall, was the Kooni Darwaza, the Bloody Gate; and beyond that still was the Old Fort built by Feroz Shah Tughlaq many more centuries ago. Still beyond stretched the remnants of the past Delhis and of the ravished splendour of once mighty Hindustan—a Humayun's tomb or a Qutab Minar. There it was that the Hindu kings had built the early Delhis, Hastinapur or Dilli;

and still in Mahroli stands the Iron Pillar as a memory of Asoka; and other ruins of the days of India's golden age, and dynasties greater than history has ever known. Today it was this very Delhi which was being despoiled by a Western race who had no sympathy with India or her sons, thought Mir Mihal. Already they had put the iron chains of slavery round their once unbending necks. (p.150)

The last half of the novel is oppressive with elegiac and decadent feeling. There are soulful references to the futility and transience of life and to the ravages of time, and an opiate effect results from the repetition of words like 'beauty', 'sadness', 'passion' and 'dreams'. Mir Nihal is 'buried under a debris of dreams', while Asghar, destined to be disappointed in love once more, weaves round himself Muslim paradisal fantasies:

Let those who cared bruise their fingers in attempting to pluck the rose....For him only one thing was lasting, one thing which kept the heart of man alive. And it was love. Men come and men die, generations pass, and centuries drag on. But love does not die. It touches the heart to Beauty, brings unbounded joy in its train. And he who is not a devotee of this beautiful goddess is not worthy of being called a man. (p.260)

Love, likened by Ahmed Ali to "a sweet thorn in the side",[49] is the main subject of his other novel, Ocean

49 Ocean of Night, Peter Owen, 1964, p.91.

of Night, which in mood, tone and imagery is a lyrical and nostalgic companion piece to Twilight in Delhi. Ocean of Night is a love story which Forster's Aziz would have enjoyed writing, for Ali expands Aziz's philosophy of the 'secret understanding of the heart'[50] and the profundity of pathos. Ali's ornate poetic prose attempts to capture the 'sadness of human life and the joy of eternity' (p.133). This aspiration, and a corresponding intensification of sensual experience, derive from the moods, attitudes and heroics of Persian and Urdu traditions. Hence Ali's resemblance to the Decadents and the Symbolists is more likely an interesting cultural coincidence than an imitation of foreign sensibility.

This resemblance emerges in statements such as "the mystery...is tantalising: reality is bare" (p.24), and "the work of art...depends for its failure or success on personality" (p.88); in the nocturnal symbolism, the Wildean rhythms, and the prismatic imagery of jewels, colours, flowers; in a dreamer's debris of blue visions of eternity and of hearts that break like glasses; in sensual formulae of love, the flame singeing 'the wings of the hovering moth' (p.69); in poetic identification of cosmic and inner realities, of 'the sadness of the Beginning and the End' (p.130) and the ecstatic transience of love.

50 E.M. Forster, A Passage to India, Penguin Books, 1954, p.21.

The story, set in Lucknow between the wars, depicts the breakdown of tradition and the conflict between secular love and religious orthodoxy. Like Anand Lall in The House at Adampur, Ali presents a picture of the lives of courtesans and decadent aristocrats in a social world on the brink of dissolution. The plot concerns the courtesan Huma: her rejection by her lover-patron, Nawab Chhakkan, and her falling in love with Kabir in contradiction to the demands of her profession and the conventional code. Huma's passions are reciprocated but it is not long before Kabir is smitten with shame, while his poet's soul, yearning for an unworldly perfection, is too egocentric to accept Huma's truly human love. Huma's tragedy is that of the heart's strength, Kabir's that of its weakness.

The exotic qualities of Ocean of Night are likely to provoke the accusation that Ali has consciously provided an unreal kind of Oriental confection for a gluttonous kind of western appetite. But such a criticism would not do justice to the author's authentically-based romanticism, the luxurious sincerity with which he writes of the emotions, and the affecting humanity of Huma. In both Twilight in Delhi and Ocean of Night Ahmed Ali has provided the reader with engaging insights into the Islamic cultural milieu and also into the Muslim artifice of eternity.

The Eliotesque theme of the waste land disintegration of cultural tradition, which Ali laments from the point of view of the Indian Muslim community, provides the main background to Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column. As the title suggests, Attia Hosain deliberately incorporates Eliot's mood and imagery of dissolution into the Muslim textures of the story. The novel is narrated in the first person by the central character, Laila, an orphan who is brought up in the aristocratic household of a large joint-family to whom she is connected by birth. Lahore provides the setting; Laila grows up during the thirties period of unrest when the gentility and cultural stability of the old order is being eroded by the political repercussions of the Independence movement. Laila and some of her cousins and friends typify the younger generation's yearning for social and political emancipation; their revolutionary sympathies are symptomatic of the frustrating bondage to the old codes of behaviour which their elders force upon them. Laila tells Ameer (the student with whom she falls in love and marries despite the family's disapproval) that her kind of upbringing crushes individuality:

"I have no courage, Ameer. I have never done anything I really believed in. Perhaps I believed in nothing enough. I have never been allowed to make decisions; they are always made for me. In the end not only one's action but one's mind is crippled. Sometimes I want

to cry out, 'You are crushing me, destroying my individuality.' If I did that they would think me stubborn and rude, or say I imagined things...."[51]

To the older generation, individuality is incompatible with the authoritative family code of honour, obedience, integrity and unity. This code is what binds the family together: 'the estate was the outward symbol of all those values to which the family owed dutiful, sacrificial obedience' (p.86). (Thus, when the estate is confiscated as a result of Partition it is the cultural rather than the economic blow that does most to disrupt the family.) The conflict between individualism and loyalty to the code is in a real sense a 'conflict of cultural values' (p.310). Laila's friend Nadira symbolises the possibility of fruitful compromise, as well as the kind of creative communal attitude that could make Pakistan a true nation:

Nadira had mellowed....Her youthful enthusiam, [sic] for an Islamic Renaissance was no longer aggressive; it had been canalised into devotion to her new country which was now a symbol of her ideals. She had become a selfless social worker among the pitiable refugees who had swarmed across the border in their

51 Sunlight on a Broken Column, Chatto & Windus, 1961, p.265.

millions, and had devoted herself to the service of unhappy victims of rape and assault and abduction.

She had seen too much of the reality of the suffering to trust demagogic slogans, and had learned the pity that drove out bitterness. (pp.299-300)

Laila also acquires maturity by way of suffering. As a rebel she was neither anarchic nor selfish; she has a sincere respect for the traditions of the older generation, and she is bound to her Aunt Abida by strong ties of love, a love that survives the ostracism that results from her marriage. In the midst of the tragic dislocations of Partition, the break-up of the family, and the death of Ameer in the war, Laila experiences the loss and pain, the separation, isolation and alienation, which haunt the waste land of the Forties. But, by the end of the novel, Laila realises that the only salvation lay in facing the future, not brooding bitterly on the past. Her coming to terms with reality is neither sentimental nor out of character, and it is significant that the death of her Aunt Abida enables her to see her own life in meaningful perspective:

In death as in life there was something for me to learn from her....I learned then that humility, love and grace could not bargain with Time. And looking at the peace of her face I felt spiritually cleansed.

...I knew now that bitterness corroded one's own being. At the time of my loss I had lost the power of understanding and reasoning....

I had felt bitter towards all those in my family who had turned against me when I was a bride, yet tried to comfort me in my widowhood.

But in that moment of revelation by Aunt Abida's dead body I learned that happiness had its own strength and was its own protection; sorrow needed to be shared. (p.311)

Looking back, Laila appreciates that it was her claim to sexual freedom which struck deep at the family code because like all communal codes its survival depended on sacrosanct taboos:

I had been guilty of admitting I loved, and love between man and woman was associated with sex, and sex was sin. My innocence was insulted, my own inhibitions outraged. (p.312)

In Sunlight on a Broken Column, as in Ahmed Ali's novels, the prominence and meaningfulness of the sexual theme can only be properly appreciated in terms of Islamic culture and Muslim sensibility. Accordingly, the melancholy and romantic sentiments which are characteristic of that sensibility derive from a rich erotic tradition as well as puritanical sexual code. This is sociologically illustrated in the case of Laila's cousin Zainab:

It was Zainab, brought up in a more confined home than mine, who told me of sex, ridiculing it because it was frightening, a girl's inevitable martyrdom whose horror could only be lessened through bawdy jokes.

Yet she thought romantically of love, the sad, unfulfilled love of traditional song and story. She had once confessed to me that she was fond of Asad, but she could not think of marrying him because she was not his equal in blood. (p.96)

Sociological comment also enters the novel by way of satirical observation. Mrs. Wadia, for example, whose husband was a senior ICS man and referred to English officials by their Christian names, is 'prouder of Western culture than those who were born into it, and more critical of Eastern culture than those outside it'. 'At times Mrs. Wadia appeared a moulting eagle, at others a well-groomed vulture' (p.129). And then there is Rai Bahadur Pushkar Nath 'of whom it was said that he had not washed his hands for days after shaking hands with the Prince of Wales in the 'twenties' (p.151).

In the final analysis, however, social observation in Sunlight on a Broken Column is a by-product of the mood of nostalgic elegy which dominates the novel, and which is poetically evoked in 'Hollow Men' and 'Waste Land' metaphors as well as being specifically stated. Eliot is referred to by name (p.258), and is present in spirit in such phrases and images as the following:

"mischief spreads like fire in a field of dry grass..." (p.76)
...the violent core of the teeming city (p.76)
We did not wait to listen...because we understood and were afraid. Death was acceptable only as an abstraction and a speculation, in stories and not in reality, at a distance and not in such cold proximity. (p.82)
...round and round the social mulberry bush. (p.221)
Her eyes refused to see dust and decay; they created a twilight that did not pick out cobwebs. (p.275)

> All of us shared that sensation of 'feeling' our roots—whether severed or not—like the pain felt in the extremities of amputated limbs. (p.299)

Laila's return to the ancestral home in the last section of the novel has symbolic as well as personal significance. The estate is neglected, crumbling, inhabited by intruders; a waste land, a 'death's dream kingdom', where tradition has been up-rooted and the once-flourishing garden is over-grown with weeds. In the darkness of the house Laila relives the nightmare past of family hostility, violence, war, Partition, death, but comes to terms with reality (as does Eliot in the final section of The Waste Land), and she emerges from the darkness of memory into the cleansing sunlight.

The house as a symbol of the traditional and ancestral past has a multitude of Indian associations (the preservation of cultural patterns, the structure of the joint-family, the family code etc.), and it is not surprising therefore that some novels which look back nostalgically, rather than in anger, at the transition of the old into the new India should take the ancestral home as a thematic focal point. This is the case, for example, in Santha Rama Rau's Remember the House, Anand Lall's The House at Adampur and Bhabani Bhattacharya's Music for Mohini. Remember the House is the best of these novels and conveys, through the first-person narrator (Indira), a sensitive response

to life; her social, amatory and family experiences are revealed against an authentic Indian background, but (unlike Bhabani Bhattacharya and Anand Lall) Santha Rama Rau artistically resists the temptation to force this background artificially upon the central characters. The House at Adampur and Music for Mohini seem to have been conceived according to proven thematic formulae (tradition versus change, duty versus love etc.) rather than as direct impressions of life sustained by fully rounded characterisations. Nevertheless, each novel interestingly reveals the special meaning India has for each of its main characters and this meaning (like Laila's) is concretely symbolised in the ancestral dwelling.

In Santha Rama Rau's novel, Indira remembers two houses in particular: Kalipur House, the Bombay residence of the Maharaja of Kalipur, and Indira's ancestral home at Jalnabad in North India. Remember the House opens on an F. Scott Fitzgerald note of nostalgia with a "swan song" party at Kalipur house to commemorate the elegant splendours of a past way of life and a lost generation:

Jay's party was the last of its sort that any of us went to in Bombay. The momentum of postwar extravagance had carried us all up to that New Year's Eve, but after that, through the early months of 1947, people became more and more self-conscious about lavishness, they took the food rationing restrictions more seriously, for instance; gradually it became unfashionable to buy

black-market gasoline for the long drives we often used to take after parties. Indian independence, only months away, was felt by most of us as a sort of wariness about our pleasures, later as a political achievement.

Parties like Jay's already seem to me so remote in mood, almost as though they belonged to another generation or to life in a different country.[52]

The mood of the opening chapter, dominated by the nostalgic songs and 'the candied strings of a Viennese waltz' (p.5) and by the elegiac brilliance of the palatial setting and sumptuous feasting, is achieved through neat and sensitive craftsmanship. Santha Rama Rau resembles Scott Fitzgerald, not only in similarity of mood, theme and situation, but also in the balanced modulations of her prose—the sensual accuracy of the descriptions; the nostalgic rhythms; the artistic harmony with which the sentimentality of the occasion, the youthful sentiments of the narrator, and the detached empathy of the author are blended yet separately identifiable. As these points can only be justified by appropriate quotation, consider the following passage:

Under the canopy of roses, scarcely noticing the Goanese musicians with their dark, sad faces shining, with their white dinner jackets padded at the shoulder and nipped in at the waist, their air of desperate nattiness, the saris and the achkans danced. Girls hummed "Sentimental Journey" gently into their partners' ears in the scented twilight of the pavilion. The

52 New York, Harper & Row, 1956, p.1.

meaningless steps were all performed gravely and without abandon....At some point I noticed the Americans among the dancers, taller than the rest, still silent, her temple pressed close to his mouth, not oblivious exactly, but generating their own air of privacy. Distantly, thumping away under the dance music and the shuffling sandals, one could hear the sea.

What with the dancing, the waving and smiling to new arrivals, the pauses by the whispering fountains to catch one's breath, to have a drink, to discuss people's clothes with Pria, I didn't realize it was midnight until a breathless, delighted voice somewhere near me said, "Oh, look, fireworks! Oh, how beautiful!" The bright head was tipped backward, the face of the American girl an extraordinary luminous green as she watched the stars cascading out of the night sky. She turned impatiently to her companion, grabbing his wrist. "Oh, hurry—let's go watch them fall in the sea—quickly—" a most compelling whisper. She ran past me, a flurry of silvery skirt, bare shoulders tense, down the steps to the lower terraces and the sea. Most of us standing there by the fountain turned without thinking to follow her. It seemed suddenly urgent to reach the water before the next rocket went up. We heard the mounting hiss from the bottom of the garden and without a word began to run toward it. Behind us the Goanese band was playing "Auld Lang Syne."

The falling lights flexed in the water, the broken reflections moved in on the waves to the rocky little beach. In soft explosions, rose pink, purple, an unearthly blue, the stars kept blossoming and falling in the night above the sea, the weird radiance lit the garden and the strangely still figures were caught in a magical intensity. (p.13)

The 'magical intensity' is Scott Fitzgerald terminology, as is the descriptively apt 'desperate nattiness' of the Goanese musicians. The ephemeral splendour of the fireworks and the urgent haste of the

group to drain the last dregs of pleasure to experience the final sensory thrill are also reminiscent of the American novelist. But perhaps most Fitzgerald-like of all is the evocation of character, the compelling gesture and intimate comment or command which bring the American girl to life. This 'life' consists of that mysterious essence of personality which attracts those around her, unconsciously compelling them to follow her lead. Such individuals seem to have a talent for spontaneously externalising the desires and emotional necessities of others. Dick Diver in Tender is the Night is such a person.

In Remember the House the 'lost generation figure' is Jay, the younger brother of the Maharaja of Kalipur. Jay's deterioration follows the familiar pattern of alcoholism, debauchery, an obsessive feeling of social redundancy, a demoralising scandal (the Maharani sells the state jewels in America), and a fading out of the story, out of his friends' lives, confessing his irresponsibility, dreaming of the past, drinking oblivion.

Another prominent American theme—more Jamesian than Fitzgerald—which Santha Rama Rau examines from an Indian point of view is the so-called international theme or cultural encounter. When the American couple (the Nichols) first arrive in India they enthusiastically look forward, like Adela Quested, to meeting Indians as real people and to discovering the real India. Alix

Nichols declares "India is just my meat". Indira comments:

I was struck at the time by the appropriateness of the phrase. It was an appetite, this grasping for experience, this immediacy, this involvement with life. A big, healthy appetite, I thought. It was only much later that it seemed like greed. (p.51)

Indira becomes friendly with the Nichols...'I think it was a kind of joy in Alix, a determination to have a good time out of life, that made her such an exotic and such a welcome addition to my world' (p.43).

The Nichols' relationship with India and Indians, after the honeymoon is over, brings to the surface of their lives an awareness of cultural incompatibilities. Alix expresses horror that Indira should contemplate a marriage which is not a love match; she is nearly hysterical after being touched by a beggar; Courtney Nichols makes a pass at Indira; and there are a number of small happenings which become known as the "Nichols episodes"—for instance, the occasion when Alix wore a sari to the American Women's Club dance, an action which was resented by the American wives and which Indians would resent as a form of condescension. Then there are the inevitable cultural chasms which result from divergent social attitudes. Whereas the Americans are devoted to success and happiness, Indira's up-bringing has emphasised different goals:

In Jalnabad, I thought, no one made much of a point about happiness. We were given, and we accepted, almost without thinking, certain precepts. The importance of the family—the one we were born to or the one we married into. Our place in a certain structure, a pattern of life, of birth, marriage, children, peace and death. Our debt to a world could be defined, but the promises were all unstated. Within our framework we would make our own happiness. It was never suggested that we pursue happiness. We were not encouraged to waste our time. (p.90)

Pria's warning to Indira that it was foolish to see too much of the Americans, and that the foreigners would end up becoming anti-Indian and seeking out their own kind, was not astray. The Nichols retreat, dissatisfied with India and Indians. India "betrays you" (p.116), Alix confides to Indira, and that confidence signifies the failure of a true confidence between cultures.

But whereas Kalipur house (where Indira first encountered the Americans) signifies the brittle transience of human relationships, the passing of gay social times and the disintegration of an ephemeral grandeur, Indira's home at Jalnabad remains a lasting source of values that permeate her personality as well as her memory. Jalnabad represents for Indira both the integral strength of childhood associations (she stares at the melting ice in her glass and is back in her grandmother's house, 'a small child standing in the crystal sunlight of north India' (p.24), holding in her hand an entrancing rainbow-studded piece of ice the fish vendor gave her), and, 'as a sort of center

of gravity', a continuity of the human spirit. The Jalnabad house provided the formative basis of Indira's moral education:

> Gradually, I suppose, the relentless evolution of the family was bringing us to a knowledge of the world. Surrounded by the different generations in the house we slowly became aware of our own stages, a little at a time saw the possibilities, the promises and the threats of our own lives, but always wrapped around by the family, enclosed by the compound walls, measured by the secure progression of the Jalnabad years. (p.50)

Although her mother and father went their separate ways, they did so in traditionally Indian style and family ties eventually prevail. Indira's mother left Bombay to be with her guru, and she looks back at her progression from the second to the third asramas with understanding and spiritual tranquility. She first left Bombay, she later told Indira, because of enemies inside herself—"Love, anger, desire, affection, pride..." (p.198). Attachment had reached the destructive stage, and non-attachment became for Indira's mother a matter of moral necessity; she tells Indira: "Almost anyone comes to a moment in their life when they feel that the part that belongs to other people is finished and they must discover the rest" (pp.60-1). Indira's father had been an active member of the Congress party for most of his life but in the new India of 1947 found he was a political memory instead of in the forefront of party affairs. Indira says that, although her father seems

old-fashioned, "...it is more than the ditch between generations. His India is gone, and suddenly, suddenly he is in a strange land, dispossessed." (p.62)

Remember the House does not end on a note of dispossession, however. The father dies loved, his family about him, and Indira accepts an orthodox proposal of marriage from a well-balanced, eligible Indian. The values enshrined in the memory of the Jalnabad house will be passed on to a new generation.

Both The House at Adampur and Music for Mohini end on the same note of resolved transition. Dewan Ram Nath is the patriarchal symbol of the enlightened older generation in The House at Adampur, and when he dies at the end of the novel he bequeaths his Adampur estate to Jai Singh, 'a well-established young lawyer who was also a prominent political figure in the Freedom Movement'.[53] This is intended by the author as a reassuring indication that the new India will not only be progressive and modern but will also preserve, and derive moral inspiration from, India's finest traditions. The symbolism of the Adampur house is spelt out quite explicitly:

Jai was aware...that here, in this hidden spot, Ram Nath kept his mistress. But he knew that, important as was the tenderness he got from her, Adampur did much more for the Dewan. It was a kind of immersion in the

53 The House at Adampur A Story of Modern India, Dennis Dobson, 1956, p.6.

unbroken past of India, into those traditions which the Dewan chose to keep alive for himself and which, when the tempo of political and other events in the country was eventually modulated, would give to those who cared for such things a beauty, depth, and perspective that participation in even the greatest events could furnish but feebly and in transience. Jai did not delve further into all this....there was a more direct reason for Jai's reluctance to explore fully his realization of what Adampur meant to Ram Nath. He had come to feel the emptiness of hiw own inner life so acutely that he shrank from the pain of this feeling. (p.229)

In view of this it is not surprising that the novel ends, on a note of symbolic resolution, with a transparent message. When Jai inherits the house he feels 'a sense of emergence' 'in the midst of an enduring movement' (p.244). Thus, without the 'enduring movement' of traditional India, the new India, no matter how progressive and politically enlightened, will not enable the inner life to flourish. It is also pointed out, during the course of the narrative, that sex and politics usually don't mix well together.

Music for Mohini is a story based on a characteristic situation: an arranged marriage and the adjustment which the modern city girl, Mohini, has to make in order to fit into the traditional rural pattern of life in Jayadev's

54 Music for Mohini, Angus and Robertson, 1952, p.93. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

aristocratic 'Big House' which is presided over by his iron-willed dowager mother; the adjustment the mother eventually makes in finally accepting Mohini (at last pregnant) as a daughter-in-law; and the adjustment the ascetic-minded intellectual Jayadev must make in order to satisfy the emotional needs of his attractive young wife as a husband should. This is India's version of the eternal triangle.

The Big House is the centre of leadership, responsibility and tradition in the ancient Bengal village of Behula. The house is 'a way of living, a stern discipline and iron tradition'.[54] Mohini is told not to forget the "history" and "sanctity" of the house's marriage bed which, like the house, was 'absorbing time' (p.119). In inheriting his father's wooden sandals, Jayadev assumes responsibility for the family tradition and its code of duty: 'These sandals were a legacy for the son—a continuity, a link in the chain of the old order lengthening from century to century' (p.145). When the village is beset with famine Jayadev adds glory to responsibility by selling some of the family jewels and heirlooms in order to feed the village. 'The Big House must stand by the people in their hour of need. Impoverished, it would yet live. Failing in its duty, it would perish by the weight of its inner defeat.' (p.145) Jayadev

54 Music for Mohini, Angus and Robertson, 1952, p.93. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

eventually puts his historical thesis aside and devotes himself to moral reform and the job of making Behula a model village, a symbol of the synthesis of the traditional and the modern which Bhabani Bhattacharya presses for as the proper basis for a modern Indian civilization.

This idea of 'synthesis', then, provides the main social premise of the novel. Jayadev dreams of a deep 'fusion' 'a profound union of today with yesterday' (p.92). Mohini's sister-in-law explains the situation to her and for the benefit of the reader:

"...We connect culture with culture, Mohini, our old Eastern view of life with the new semi-Western outlook. The city absorbs a little of the 'barbaric' village, the village absorbs a little of the 'West-polluted' city. Both change, unaware. They are less angry with each other. This is more urgent today than ever before. Our new India must rest on this foundation."

..."Mohini, look. To start with, you have to understand the Big House. My mother is the usual orthodox Hindu woman, only she is more intense than others, and all her faith is pinned to family tradition. No deviation for her, not one inch. Stern-willed, though tender at heart, she is a simple soul, with singleness of purpose, a one-eyed mind. She lives for the Big House; she wouldn't have it changed the least way.... And Jayadev?....A strange mixture of the old and new is he, my brother. Self-divided...We've known him as a scholar in the philosophies of East and West...the new Learning holds him as much as the old, so that his heart is set on a synthesis, as he calls it. He would have a harmony of cultures for India. He reads ancient thought in today's light. He seeks in ancient thought sanction for the West-influenced ideals of our time.

And he finds it. He is a man with a message for his country...." (pp.111-2)

Jayadev's synthesis, the novel's message. Music for Mohini is written from a point of view of social seriousness, even to a missionary degree.

One genre of Indian novel which has yet to be discussed and is relevant to the analysis of social trends in the Indian novel is the kind of work which exploits the Indian social scene for the purpose of creating fiction in the popular vogue. Manohar Malgonkar's Combat of Shadows is such a work, and at the same time is interesting in that it adds a new social dimension to Indian fiction in English— the life of the Anglo-Indian (i.e. Eurasian) and his relationship with Indians and, in particular, with the British in India.

In Combat of Shadows Malgonkar endeavours to reconcile melodramatic behaviourism with such sociological aspects of race-relations as the collision of east and west, the rootlessness of the Anglo-Indian, the degeneration and dehumanisation of the colonial alien, and sexual transgression. Set against a background of tea plantations and English colonial society in North-Western Assam from September 1938 to March 1940, the story provides such primary fictional excitements as suspense, coincidence, delayed revelation, scenes of passion and sexual candour, as well as the cinemascopic setting.

The main plot involves the downfall of Henry Winton, manager of the Brindian Tea Company's Silent Hill plantation, and interwoven into the story are four sub-plots which can be conveniently defined as the love quadrilateral, the revenge drama, the elephant hunt, and the undisclosed relationship.

Composing the quadrilateral love situation are the racial-erotic involvements, tensions and conflicts of Winton, his wife Jean, the Anglo-Indians Ruby Miranda (with 'the bold roving eyes of a Chandni-Chowk whore and the full-blown contours of a harem favourite'[55]) and the mercurial Eddie Trevor. This situation, which is one of changing sexual alliances, is complicated by the revenge drama which is in turn complicated by the elephant hunt which is in turn complicated by the undisclosed relationship. Thus Winton's downfall is not solely the result of his amatory failings. He becomes snared in a web of hatred and revenge which is largely of his own making, of—his arrogant contempt for Indians, the corrosive effect of his race consciousness in personal relations, his negligence in causing the death of his hunting guide who was killed by the rogue elephant he had been commissioned to shoot, and his calculated destruction of Eddie. These blunders produce a quartet of enemies: Gauri, a plantation worker,

55 Hamish Hamilton, 1962, p.15.

Ruby, the guide's son Pasupati, and the Brindian Resident Director, 'Sudden' Dart.

The amatory revenges precipitate the major revenge climaxes, and the elephant, believed by villagers to be a God of Vengeance, is an appropriate symbolic agent of destruction. Brutalised by raving jealousy after Gauri sadistically provides proof of Jean's adultery, Winton supplies faulty cartridges to Eddie when the latter offers to shoot the elephant. 'The elephant-god...obliged.'

Eddie's death, however, results in the revelation of the undisclosed relationship. Winton learns to his horror that Dart is Eddie's father. In an atmosphere of impending disaster, the strands of counter-revenge are woven by Dart, Ruby and Pasupati, and Winton is burned to death in the Highlands game cottage. Thus, at the end, each of the worlds in which Winton has transgressed—India, Anglo-India, and the little England in India—is revenged.

An example of the zeal with which Malgonkar has pieced his narrative together is his assiduous, and in retrospect, pointed preparation for the disclosure that Eddie is Dart's son. In Chapter Two, Winton is told that Sudden is reputed to have "fathered one or two" of the Anglo-Indian "bastards floating round the tea district" (p.10). Further clues are provided by

Dart's mysterious tolerance of Trevor senior, which suggests to Jean "some sort of old family quarrel, some kind of skeleton" (p.39), and his unconventional interest in Eddie. Winton remarks ironically that "Sir Jeffrey treats Eddie like a favourite son" (p.197). Malgonkar's handling of this sub-plot illustrates his narrative reliance on coincidence, suspense, and melodramatic inevitability. Towards the climax, as Winton's moral distraction and pathological anxieties become acute, the point of view is virtually limited to his distorted perceptions; but it is a fairly crude approximation of a Poe technique. For, although the reader's awareness seems intended to coincide with Winton's final shock of recognition, and Winton is deceived by Dart in their last interview (Dart's attention throughout was riveted ominously on the mounted tusk of the rogue elephant) and by Ruby's amorous promises and Pasupati's servile attentions, the real situation is rather transparent.

As well as these obvious dramatic contrivances, sensationalism (particularly of the violent and promiscuous variety), psychological oversimplification, unsubtle irony, and patches of banality and cliche are further weaknesses that can be attributed to the entertainment design. Not suprisingly, then, the portrayal of Winton is at times so arbitrarily satirical that his gestures brand him too theatrically as a symbol both of white

xenophobia and the modern sexual malaise.

The scenes most in danger of sensationalism are those in which unrestrained emotions are depicted. Chapter Thirty-One provides an example. Gauri takes Winton to Wallach's Folly (a miniature peak that affords a view of the Silent Hill countryside) so that he can observe a clandestine meeting between Jean and Eddie. It is an important scene, precipitating as it does the final catastrophes, and a potentially powerful one. However, the emotional intensities of the situation are poorly served by novelese mannerisms, inflated effects, and stilted scripting:

> Henry turned upon her in a blind rage and brought the back of his hand crashing against her mouth with a resounding smack...But all she did was to throw her head back and laugh, laugh with the drops of blood spurting out of lips in a thin red line...
> "Stop it, stop it!..." he roared, and lunged viciously...staggering to the edge of the cliff, flinging out his arms wildly and grabbing at nothingness. (p.251)

The writing also lapses, on occasions, into a type of banal grandiloquence and euphemism to which some Indian writers are addicted:

> It was a hesitant, even half-hearted sort of kiss when it began, but Jean had taken it over from him and transformed it into a lingering, searing moment of bliss...it had become an exploration into forbidden territory...an unmistakable preliminary to higher rewards. (p.8)

This can only be described, at best, as magazine prose.

Nevertheless, in spite of the debilitating effects of Malgonkar's entertainment formula, Combat of Shadows does have a framework of serious ideas which gives the story a semblance of allegory. Winton is, as well as a melodramatic anti-hero, a sociological symbol. In the light of his anachronistic aspiration to an empire code based on hereditary ideas of colonisation, leadership, and rule, he is depicted as a code failure. On this level the novel can be interpreted as a vision of the modern debasement of an antiquated myth, or ideal, of conquest and service. A parody of the empire-builder, Winton sees himself as 'the man on the spot' confronting anarchic India; he is caricatured by the thought that it takes 'a crisis to bring out the best in a man' (with Winton the opposite is the case) and feels a 'kinship with the figures of history' (p.125). Winton's tin-god failings are those of the 'undeveloped' sahib 'heart' of Forster's definition: lack of compassion, arrogance, prejudice, class consciousness, sycophancy. Jean accurately describes him as the "pucca, all-white sahib, afraid of being contaminated", afraid of Ruby's "touch of colour" (p.198). His code exterior becomes increasingly and neurotically irreconcileable with the insecure misfit who is the real person; it is a death mask.

Malgonkar prevents the sociological allegory from being one-sided by complementing Winton's deficiencies with the seasoned strength of Captain Cockburn, a senior colleague and the only character in the novel the reader is encouraged to admire. A last true representative of the code, he is ironically adjudged a failure, said to have 'gone to seed' and 'suspected of having gone half native' (p.8). He is 'unconventional' in accepting India, and in being passionately devoted to Urdu poetry. He is compassionate, earthy, outspoken, a hearty but healthy sensualist who has preserved his integrity, a wise efficient administrator who is loved by his coolies. From Winton's and the English community's point of view, he is grotesquely irreconcileable with their image of the sahib who, in the splendour of his official isolation, rules Indians from a sanitary distance. Whereas Cockburn has come to terms with India, Winton is overwhelmed by India.

The crisis of the hunting guide's death provides the most dramatic contrast between Cockburn and Winton. The captain is indeed the man on the spot, 'the cool centre of a world in turmoil, the personification of a quiet, almost wordless efficiency' (p.83), whereas Winton is confused and panicky. The older man's exposition of the situation is realistic, as is his appreciation of the sahib-Indian relationship and 'izzat':

"Sudden will never forgive you for having let down the side in the eyes of his powerful friends in the Government....the Indian Ministers will laugh their heads off; and the villagers will whisper behind your back....They can understand incivility—indeed they almost expect it from the ruling class. But never cowardice...to lose face with the Indians is your death warrant." (pp.86-7)

To Winton's incredulity that "a shooting accident could conceivably lead to anything political" Cockburn, in replying that in India "everything that concerns a sahib is political" and that Winton has "to live by Sudden's values" (pp.86-7) sums up the reality of colonial relationships.

The occasion is crucial to the narrative and is indicative of Malgonkar's ability to fuse, in direct scene, apparently disparate interests—social commentary; characterisation, for Cockburn's perspicacity and calm practical qualities provide a standard against which Winton's moral confusion and later collapse can be measured; and thematic interrelating of the code of leadership with the general social issue. Further, the scene throws light on another code-theme relationship: that of the code of the hunter and a theme of fate.

The death of Kistulal is the first link in a chain of error and guilt. Winton has failed to uphold the hunter's code. "There's such a thing as the hunter's

responsibility...to look after his shikari" (p.85), Cockburn reminds him. Winton's fear of failure, however, is stronger than his sense of guilt. The corruption of his status as a hunter is emblematic of his moral collapse—dishonour, dishonesty in relationships, and abandonment to an evil course for which he feels no remorse. But he is not a dispassionate malefactor, and he is plagued by his mind's dark forces which assume the nightmare shape of the elephant, which 'had become a symbol...a deadly and cunning adversary equally determined to seek him out and destroy him'. (p.235).

The elephant symbolises fate and retribution, which thus are seen working through external nature with a god-like power of intervention. The villagers believe that it is an incarnation of Ganesa, the elephant-god who also had only one tusk. (In Hindu mythology Ganesa, coincidentally, is worshipped by Gauri whose name-sake in the novel influences Winton's fate.) Malgonkar makes thematic use of the god's traditional fatalistic role as the 'king of impediments'. The inexorability of the elephant is suggested by such epithets as 'diabolically cunning', 'revengeful', 'temperamental', 'illusive', 'treacherous', 'supreme', 'all-pervading', 'invisible', etc. In a sense, the elephant is India itself, and Winton's failure as a hunter signifies his inability to come to terms with India.

The importance of the elephant to the crystallisation of the character-fate conjunction is well illustrated in the hunting accident, which is a kind of Lord Jim situation. Winton's failure to test the cartridges, his panic when the gun does not fire, and his blind flight are comparable to the circumstances in which Jim abandons the Patna. In both situations the human element is related to an element of accident (the faulty cartridges, the sunken wreck). Conrad's general implication is that character is fate in the sense that fate is not mere chance but a human correlative. Malgonkar, however, places, in Indian fashion, more emphasis on the externality of fate. While his working out of character through circumstances is apparent (Winton's destiny is consistent with his weaknesses and mistakes), it is not achieved without extraordinary strain. Indeed, events seem to conspire against Winton with monotonous inevitability: he is unlucky in his 'choice' of enemies, in purchasing cartridges, in the way proof of his guilt regarding his shikari filters out; he is prevented (by the author) from realising that Ruby was not responsible for Eddie's arrival at Silent Hill; he has kept the remainder of the faulty cartridges without knowing why; he sleeps in on the one morning he could have killed the elephant, and a leg injury prevents him from shooting it the following morning but provides him with the fatal opportunity to dispose of Eddie. And a couple of bad

omens are thrown in for good measure: the night of Sankranti, which belongs to the goddess of destruction, inaugurates Winton's last efforts to kill the elephant, while the night of his death is Amawasya, 'the night of total darkness'.

Such conspiracy of circumstance may inspire in the reader a specious sympathy for Winton. Admittedly his marital distress is conveyed with understanding, even detached feeling, but the absence of redeeming features or remnants of nobility prevents his catastrophe from having more than pathetic significance. What prevails finally is the revenge psychology rather than pity or a sense of waste.

Nevertheless, there is in Combat of Shadows an implicit moral view-point which makes Winton's fate meaningful in traditional Hindu terms. Thus, just as the melodramatic plot is the basis of sociological allegory, so the naturalistic psychology of the characterisation (on the surface, a crude Freudian dualism of Eros and Thanatos) is the basis of moral allegory. Malgonkar's fundamental moral premise is that the human soul exists in a jungle of inner nature similar to the elephant-god's jungle of outer nature, of primeval darkness where evil lurks. The mind's 'dark forest of delusion' is a conventional Hindu image and is to be found, for example, in the Bhagavad Gita.

Malgonkar prefaces Combat of Shadows with, and derives the title from, the following passage in the Gita: 'Desire and Aversion are opposite shadows. Those who allow themselves to be overcome by their struggle cannot rise to a knowledge of reality'. Winton is a kind of mythologisation of this eternal conflict, and most of the other characters are also delineated in terms of this psychological principle. In this way, the author contrives within the fatalistic theme a moral balance between symbol and character: the elephant represents fate as a cosmic force, while fate is seen to work through Winton, in a scripturally meaningful sense, as a consequence of thought and action.

The character of Winton and the nature of his personal relationships are striking confirmation of the picture the Gita presents of the person who, absorbed in his own passions, is caught in the bonds of attachment. The Bhagavad Gita lays threnodic repetitive emphasis on the condition of the 'lower nature'. Man takes 'the path of darkness' by becoming absorbed in the 'violence of the senses' (2.60); in this state he experiences 'attraction', 'desire', 'the lust for possession', 'passion', and 'anger' (2.62). He becomes a victim of 'the delusion of division which comes from desire and hate' (7.72), and his 'passion' is 'the great evil, the sum of destruction...the enemy of the soul' (3.40). Passion causes 'destruction', not only because it releases hate, but also because it causes 'confusion

of mind' and 'the ruin of reason' (2.63).[56] Such is Winton's condition; such is the basis of Malgonkar's moral elaborations.

The animality of the lower nature and the destructiveness of the passions are notions implicit in the animal imagery of Combat of Shadows. During Winton's first association with Jean he takes her to the game cottage; when a pair of samburs are ambushed by a tiger and the female is killed Jean's passion also suffers a death, and she screams "I hate you" to the bewildered Henry. It is a somewhat Lawrencian episode minus poetic rationalisation. Similarly, the chapter "Mating Call", describing the python's mating season, metaphorically anticipates the relationship, and its consequences, between Jean and Eddie, and Henry's temporary rapprochement with Ruby. Jean comments: "All because of a mating call. Instead of finding a mate, they get their heads blown off—it's horrible" (p.179). Gauri uses the simile "like a scorpion before a lizard" (p.247) to describe Winton's conjugal powerlessness. He later thinks of Eddie as 'an ant or beetle, to be crushed at will' (p.258).

Winton never escapes his 'lower nature' and 'the delusion of division'; consequently he never experiences the 'joy' and 'peace' of 'being', which is the quintessence of the 'higher nature'. This failure of

56 Translated by Juan Mascaro, Penguin Books, 1962.

aspiration is suggested through Malgonkar's ironic symbolism of setting. Crucial happenings occur in three settings which provide the condition of isolation necessary to the discovery of the inner self: Silent Hill, Wallach's Folly, the game cottage.

Winton's plantation bungalow is 'perched high up in the skies, remote and inaccessible' (p.190); from it he can survey 'his sparkling domain snuggled against the stark immensity of the Himalayas' (p.145). However, he is not equal to the setting, the spiritual vision; he does not have the strength to withstand the strains of alienation, nor of 'solitude', 'the great drawback' but 'ultimate saving grace' (p.1). Wallach's Folly proves the illusoriness of his hopes of contentment in a 'completely cut off' world, hopes that revolve round Jean.

> Wallach's Folly had suddenly assumed a new significance in his relationship with Jean....the little toy peak was still his, the highest point in his domain...(p.199).

But Eddie, not Henry, takes her there, on their first rendezvous. And it is at Wallach's Folly, of course, that Winton discovers the truth about them. The thematic inference of his fall down the cliff-face is obvious. The game cottage, 'built high up in a tree' and 'separated from the world', is the scene of the first crisis in the Jean-Henry relationship. It is

also here that Winton experiences one of his rare moments of peace—'his mind fully in tune with all creation' (p.231)—in which he comes close to a momentary transcendence of the lower self. But the peace is shattered by the reassertion of desire ('an acute longing for Ruby') and a return to the delusion of division. Finally, of course, the game cottage is the scene of Winton's retribution by fire.

And so ends a journey from heaven through purgatory to hell.

In the light of the sociological and moral allegory underlying the conception of the novel, it is clear that the combat of shadows represents both an external racial conflict and an internal conflict of desire and aversion. The delusive nature of the flesh-and-blood passions, as conceived by Malgonkar, perhaps explains the utter negativism of the main character. However, such a moral vision is not ultimately an adequate compensation for Malgonkar's preoccupation with a base humanity, nor for the artistic limitations of an anti-hero who can inspire neither pity nor terror, and whose sufferings lack nobility. The world is lost, but not well lost.

Manohar Malgonkar's primary intention as a novelist is to unite light entertainment and serious social analysis, and in this line of writing he is perhaps the most sophisticated of the novelists discussed in the present chapter.

5 A SENSE OF IDENTITY: THE NOVELS OF KAMALA MARKANDAYA

Although the dispossessed personality's quest for identity is a commonplace theme in modern fiction, for most Indian novelists writing in English it has a peculiarly Indian immediacy. Such a novelist is Kamala Markandaya who, to date, has published five novels: Nectar in a Sieve (1954), Some Inner Fury (1955), A Silence of Desire (1960), Possession (1963), and A Handful of Rice (1966). Each of these novels deals with different predicaments of identity; of the rural and urban poor in Nectar in a Sieve and A Handful of Rice respectively, the younger generation lost in the political confusion of the Independence struggle in Some Inner Fury, a married couple reconciling tradition and modernity in A Silence of Desire, and an ambivalent expatriate in Possession. We are also shown how each predicament is affected by the East-West clash of codes that is part of modern India.

Kamala Markandaya's fiction is of particular interest within the context of the modern Indian novel because it crystallises various literary directions that the quest for identity has taken since the Thirties. Two main directions—philosophical and sociological—are clearly discernible. In the Indian novel in English the chief exponent of the philosophical novel is Raja Rao, while Mulk Raj Anand of course has led the field of politically-committed writers. The philosophical quest involves a familiar web of dualisms from which the Indian protagonist must disentangle his complex identity: tradition versus change, mysticism versus materialism, soul versus body, faith versus reason, moral code versus free-will, etc. On the other hand, the sociological barriers to self-realisation—caste, poverty, exploitation, environmental extremes, over-population, political turmoil, etc.—are more immediate in a day-to-day sense.

Undoubtedly, the Indian writer's sense of identity is related to literary integrity with respect to matters of language and the consciousness of a Western audience. Also, on the personal level, it is related to his temperamental associations with Europe, particularly as a result of having lived in the West. In this connection the phenomenon of cultural schizophrenia—of the writer alienated from his society—is well known.

A straight-forward example is the protagonistic 'I' in D.F. Karaka's There Lay the City. Having returned to India from Europe for the third time, he attempts to isolate himself from people in the impregnable solitude of his Bombay garret, insulated with memories of Seville, London, and Paris. However, the inadequacies of his self-imposed isolation become painfully apparent when his hesitant love affair with an Anglo-Indian ends tragically. Possibly Karaka wanted to demonstrate the potential dangers of two cultures meeting in the one person. Much fiction of this kind, it seems, can be traced back via A Passage to India to the Forsterian spectacle of threatened and mummifying identities.

In The Serpent and the Rope, on the other hand, Raja Rao examines the cultural psychology underlying an East-West relationship with originality and authority. There is much more to this novel than a surface symbolism signifying, in the failure of the marriage between the Indian Rama and the French Madeleine, the impossibility of making an exchange of cultural identities a basis for the full realisation of personality. It is with the Indian girl Savithri, not Madeleine, that Rama discovers the truth, in the Indian sense, that 'existence is I' (p.81). She helps him to realise the Hindu awareness of self in himself: 'She became the awareness behind my awareness, the leap of my

understanding' (p.171). This is 'understanding' in accordance with traditional wisdom and the mystical doctrine in The Bhagavad Gita that true knowledge of self is salvation. Freedom from the lower 'I am' and its bonds of selfish attachments results in realisation of the higher 'I am'—the mystical identity of Self.

This Hindu quest for identity through knowing the self is similarly the basis of much of R.K. Narayan's fiction. The main character in The Printer of Malgudi, Srinivas, is an explicit example. Srinivas decides that his primary professional function as a newspaper editor is to

> search for an unknown stabilizing factor in life, for an unchanging value, a knowledge of the self, a piece of knowledge which would support as on a rock the faith of Man and his peace; a knowledge of his true identity, which would bring no depression at the coming of age, nor puzzle the mind with conundrums and antitheses.[57]

Both Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan stress the traditional elements of a truly Indian sense of identity. Similarly Kamala Markandaya in A Silence of Desire and

57 The Printer of Malgudi, Michigan State University Press, 1957, p.171.

Possession superimposes on this background tradition certain predicaments of identity with which a modern Indian may be faced. In both novels an enigmatic Swamy is implicated in the central action and symbolises, as an alternative to a modern materialistic way of life, a traditional set of values. In A Silence of Desire the two contrary approaches to life—Eastern faith and Western pragmatism—seem to be opposed with a little sceptical restraint on the author's part, for having posed questions relating to the Swamy's authenticity she tends to avoid answering them. At the same time, however, the novel is seen to end with the suggestion that a definite compromise between the old and the new India is possible.

The persons chiefly involved are Sarojini and her husband Dandekar; they represent the old way of faith and the new way of reason, respectively. When Sarojini learns that she has a benign tumour of the womb she believes that she can only be cured, with the Swamy's help, by faith. She fears as soul-destroying Dandekar's rational approach to the problem and his sensible advocacy of hospital treatment. But against the stubborn resistance of what he regards as her superstitious credulity his identity as a rational being seems to dissolve and their marriage appears to be disintegrating. Dandekar first becomes aware of the

precariousness of his position when, worried by Sarojini's mysterious outings, he traces her to the Swamy's house where an audience is in session:

> His head was swimming, rather as if he had entered some new element without preparation....His sense of identity began to slip; he knew who he was—I am Dandekar, he said to himself, but the words had no reality. His knowledge of time had gone.[58]

The disciples present at this gathering are oblivious of Dandekar's presence. When confronted with their spiritual and timeless reality or 'element', his solid material reality, his identities of husband at home and government clerk at the office, seem illusory.

The presentation in A Silence of Desire of a marriage relationship during this crisis does justice to the human complexities inherent in such a situation, and is the most successful feature of the novel. By comparison the resolution of the crisis seems a trifle contrived: before leaving town the Swamy tells Sarojini that her faith is strong enough to ensure the success of surgery, and this proves to be the case. Nevertheless, at the end both husband and wife have enlarged their sense of identity by becoming aware of the limitations of their respective approaches to life: Sarojini because she recognises that the fulfilment of

58 A Silence of Desire, Putnam, 1960, p.80.

faith may be dependent on practical action, and Dandekar because he is forced to acknowledge his debt to the Swamy and his spiritual methods.

Taking the symbolic hint explicit at the end of the novel that Sarojini and Dandekar at last achieve a true marriage of spirit and flesh, heart and head, it can be seen that Kamala Markandaya has carefully worked into the texture of her story those philosophical issues which help to define the dramatic action as an identity quest. Thus Sarojini worships the tulasi tree as a manifestation of the divine, whereas Dandekar draws precise distinctions—'the difference between the reverence due to a symbol, and to its actuality; between the tulasi tree, and its maker' (p.6). She says to him, bitterly,

"...you with your Western notions, your superior talk of ignorance and superstition...you don't know what lies beyond reason and you prefer not to find out. To you the tulasi is a plant that grows in earth like the rest—an ordinary common plant...." (pp.87-8)

Sarojini's spiritual need of the Swamy gradually dispossesses Dandekar, who realises that 'a spiritual ingrowing...made it impossible for him to be whole so long as any part of her was missing' (p.191). Such negation of the spirit prohibits 'true identity'. This is the dilemma, Kamala Markandaya suggests, of the new India.

On the other hand, the author implies with equal clarity that negation of the body, resulting from a combination of necessity and tradition, can also be destructive:

> In this country the body has long taken second place, forced into that position by a harshness of circumstances which it would hardly have weathered without the sustenance of the spirit; by a harshness of climate, in which a consideration for the body would have been the purest painful folly; and by the teachings of a religion, itself perhaps shaped by these, which sought to turn the eye inward and find there the core of being. If Sarojini wanted to die she would; better to accept that... (pp.198-9)

Such is the trying fate the old India transmits to the new. But in the parable of Dandekar and Sarojini united in a new way, A Silence of Desire offers the hope of a new identity reconciling past and present in a better future.

Kamala Markandaya explores this theme of the loss and recovery of identity in a quite different context in her next novel, Possession, where the frames of reference are traditional contemplative India and the active possessive West. Possession is a drama of de-Indianisation in which the central character, the artist Valmiki, is not only culturally and psychologically conditioned by the West, but also 'possessed' by it. The presentation of this theme is complex because the possession is literal and symbolic at the same time;

for, while the substance of the novel's action is the taking over of Valmiki by an Englishwoman, Lady Caroline Bell, Kamala Markandaya interprets this as symbolic of the historic relations between Britain and India. Just as independence was essential to a national Indian identity, so at the end of the novel Valmiki's moral and artistic salvation is dependent on a severance of relations with Caroline Bell and a return to India. It is with his Indian mentor, the Swamy, not his English mentor, that he will achieve his true identity as a painter and a man.

The details of Caroline's relationship with Valmiki reveal to a significant extent that the author conceives it as a parable on imperialism, particularly with respect to the degeneration of altruistic despotism into exploitation and self-interest. Caroline Bell first meets her boy protege in his South Indian village where, preferring dreaming and painting to the usual village activities, he is an outcast. Recognising that Valmiki has talent, she virtually buys him from his parents and takes him to England where she intends to make him into a great painter. That is her altruism. She is wealthy, beautiful, arrogant, voracious, egoistic. The daughter of a Governor of an Indian state, she is emblematic of the old Empire:

> She was supremely confident, born and brought up to be so, with as little thought of fallibility as a colonial in the first flush of empire, as a missionary in the full armour of his mission, dogged by none of the hesitancies that handicap lesser breeds.[59]

Under Caroline's intimate patronage Valmiki achieves success in the Western sense, which the author defines in terms of money, public acclaim, and exhibitionism. After hesitations, acclimatisation problems, failures of inspiration, personality difficulties, Valmiki acquired a knowledge of Western ways, an ostentatious artistic persona, and the kind of artificial extravagant personality which conformed to the English notion of what an Oriental should be like. 'India had come into fashion' (pp.120-1)

> The East was too strident, too dissonant, too austere, too raw; it had to be muted, toned down, tarted up... its music larded with familiar rhythms, its literature wrenched into shapes recognised by Western tradition, its dances made palatable by an infusion of known idioms, its people taught to genuflect before understatement—before a measure of acceptance came. Undilute East had always been too much for the West; and soulful East always came lap-dog fashion to the West... (pp.106-7)

Nevertheless, beneath the facade fashioned by cultural imperialism, there still remained in Valmiki the

[59] Possession, Putnam, 1963, p20.

'vestiges' of an honest identity, 'a cold and watchful inner eye, as disdainful of others as of himself' (p.107). Also his inner eye derives inspiration from Ellie (a Jewish refugee to whom Caroline gives a home until Valmiki's interest in her becomes a threat to Caroline's authority); his horrified contemplation of Ellie's past suffering becomes the subject of powerful paintings. The Swamy had advised him to look for the truth, and in Ellie he finds it. He also makes her pregnant.

However, with Caroline, after all the benefit of patronage had been swept aside, Valmiki is only left with the illusoriness of success and material possessions. His love affair with Caroline is a carnal instinct for possession from which he soon seeks to defect. To win him back, she reveals that Ellie committed suicide. Forced to come to terms with his guilt, ironically and pathetically Valmiki's only remaining sense of identity is his attachment to Minou, the pet monkey he had bought to enhance his Indian image and of whom, as he says, he "took possession like a god, for ends of my own" (p.211). The monkey's death adds a further dimension to his moral culpability and, presented as it is with calculated pathos, serves to get into perspective his guilt concerning Ellie and the confusion of values behind his hybrid mask. East is east and West is west.

Kamala Markandaya's main device for presenting the themes and moral issues in Possession is the narrator, Anasuya. Although Anasuya admires Caroline's forcefulness and individuality, she views her own relations with Caroline (and, by implication, Valmiki's) in the light of bitter historical experience. When Caroline refers to their "love-hate relationship" like "Britain and India used to have", Anasuya comments mentally:

> I wouldn't have called it that, I thought; it would have been difficult, with majestic exceptions, to have found much love lurking in the old relationship. Perhaps, indeed, relationship was not the word to describe a forcible possessing which had established nothing so clearly as that there could be no reasonable relationship.... (p.69)

However, despite Caroline's attempt to mould Valmiki into the image she desires, despite the contamination of the West's least admirable 'values', Valmiki's talent never lost the need for India's 'extraordinary confusion' and 'passionate agglomeration of colour' (p.48), the 'combination of passion and austerity' (p.107) his country inspired in his work. He was 'not entirely rapt in fatuity' (p.159). India has a spiritual meaning for him, without which he cannot paint in the way he must. There was still in his painting the "power" and "menace" of the "transcendent...universe" (p.159). He says the "Indian sun" makes him "think of the terrible power there was up

there...you always ended up thinking of God" (p.150). Moreover, in the East-West duel for Valmiki's soul it is the Swamy's non-combatant philosophy of ascetic detachment which ultimately triumphs over Caroline's sophisticated instinct for possession. Like the Swamy, Valmiki remains a spiritual nomad. Anasuya infers correctly that Caroline saw the Swamy as 'the real adversary', the one who could see through her 'declarations of an austere disinterestedness' and 'resist her taking and keeping possession of what she wanted' (p.101). And, in the end, Valmiki returns to the Swamy's wilderness of misfits where, in the holy caves, he will dedicate his talent, in sculpture and wall paintings, to the divine spirit of the universe.

The moral salvation of the hero: it is, of course, an arbitrarily idealistic denouement. However, a critical test of its authenticity perhaps should take into account the Indian tradition of the moral tale so that the ending can be judged accordingly. Further the emphatic moral resolution of the basic conflict in Possession follows logically from the symbolic structure of the story. During the course of the novel Valmiki loses his moral innocence, betrays the sanctity of life principle, and learns that the possessor eventually becomes the victim of his passion for possession. That his expiation can best be

achieved through the Swamy's way of non-attachment is psychologically valid and perfectly consistent with the novel's moral premises. Thus, if Valmiki's salvation is to be shown to be real the novel requires the kind of emphatic moral conclusion to the detachment-possession conflict which the author provides. Moreover, it makes good sense that it is traditional India with its insatiable appetite for outcasts and outsiders, and not the affluent patronising West, that provides a true home for Valmiki. Thus the spectacle of an Indian talent encouraged, seduced, and almost destroyed by the West adds to the East/West, detachment/possession, reality/illusion structure yet a further level of allegory and another aspect of the 'identity predicament'.

In Possession and A Silence of Desire, then, the nature and importance of a sense of Indian identity is defined mainly in terms of traditional values and concepts; the underlying assumptions and determinants are moral or philosophical rather than sociological. Sociological details of environment are by no means absent, but, apart from the East-West context in Possession, they are there as part of the realistic background rather than as crucial elements in the central theme. However, Kamala Markandaya's other three novels—Nectar in a Sieve, Some Inner Fury, A Handful of Rice—do stress the social economic and political determinants of human identity. Thus these

three novels can be considered, rewardingly, in terms of the 'sociological' direction in the Indian novel of the quest for identity.

The kind of distinction that applies here, like the body/soul distinction, is that between the Hindu idea of 'self' and a socio-biological concept of man. In modern Indian literature there has been a tendency for writers to describe the realisation of selfhood in terms of one or the other of these concepts, rather than as a fusion of both, partly because this 'dissociation of sensibility' is fundamental to Hinduism. Possibly the Muslim writer is less prone to it, while to some writers in the Western tradition like D.H. Lawrence it would be anathema. On the other hand, no good novelist makes only artificial distinctions; R.K. Narayan, for example, is too shrewd and reliable an observer of life to present human beings theoretically instead of as they are.

At any rate, the sociological Indian novel has made a real contribution to the understanding of the common man and his problems, of the issues involved in the Independence struggle, and of the tragedy of Partition, in particular. The sociological novelists (largely Leftists and social realists) have spotlighted various social agonies and have promulgated a revolutionary socialist humanism based on an ideo-

logical ideal (as opposed to the Hindu metaphysical ideal) of man. So far as tradition is concerned, in the main they direct their criticism against such adherence to reactionary forms as prevents economic progress and social emancipation. They tend to abhor not tradition, but the corruption or misuse of it. This is particularly so in the case of the peasant novel, in which the peasant is invariably portrayed as a man who, after generations of increasingly severe exploitation, has been forced to forfeit his traditional role, with its simple dignity, and his self-sufficiency. Nectar in a Sieve is an elegy on this theme.

Nectar in a Sieve is the story of a peasant family and their village. The story is told by Rukmani, the family's mother of sorrows, who remembers the early days of her marriage to Nathan, and the dignity of labour that used to be the basis of the traditional farming community until the introduction of a tannery in the village destroyed the old rural order. She also laments the birth, death and defection of her children, the economic repressions which forced the peasants off their land, and the death of Nathan in the city where displaced peasants starved on their inadequate wages as casual labourers. Compassion and attention to characterisation prevent the novel's social criticism from becoming inappropriately obtrusive. Nevertheless, Nectar in a Sieve is a worthy indictment of an irrational inhumane industrialisation which exploits

the poor, and which destroys time-honoured peasant codes without replacing them with adequate substitutes. The novel is not anti-progress, however; the English Doctor Kenny, who builds a hospital in the village, symbolises progressive enlightenment and the need for a constructive programme of rural reform.

Without idealising the hereditary existence of the peasant, Kamala Markandaya demonstrates that his sense of identity springs from a traditional intimacy with the earth, with nature's cycles of creation, destruction and preservation:

> ...the calamities of the land belong to it alone, born of wind and rain and weather, immensities not to be tempered by man or his creations. To those who lived by the land there must always come times of hardship, of fear and hunger, even as there are years of plenty. This is one of the truths of our existence as those who live by the land know: that sometimes we eat and sometimes we starve....
>
> Still, while there was land there was hope.[60]

This primal existence has moral significance. 'The sowing of the seed disciplines the body and the sprouting of the seed uplifts the spirit...' (p.107). The peasant roles are archetypal and clearly defined: Rukmani as child-bearer, Nathan as provider. He derives his identity and self-respect from his knowledge of the land:

60 Nectar in a Sieve, The New English Library, 1962, p.136.

> He liked to see his sons beside him, to teach them the ways of the earth: how to sow; to transplant; to reap; to know the wholesome from the rotten, the unwelcome reed from the paddy; and how to irrigate or drain the terraces. In all these matters he had no master... (p.67)

Out of the primal man-nature relationship the peasant's codes of pride and honour have evolved, though—as the dowry system indicates—prestige at the cost of penury is an exacting social virtue.

Kamala Markandaya distinguishes between ordinary man as a victim of nature and as a victim of an industrial society. As a victim of nature, the peasant has some chance of retaining his identity ('while there was land there was hope'), but as a victim of modern society he is confronted by forces more intimidating to him than storm and drought because they are unfamiliar, outside his comprehension. The sprawling tannery swallows up the villagers' land; 'it got the power that money brings, so that to attempt to withstand it was like trying to stop the onward rush of the great juggernaut' (pp.135-6). Throughout Rukmani's narrative the pervasive mood of peasant fatalism, expressed in such statements as 'Blame the wind and the rain and the sun and the earth; they cannot refute it, they are the culprits' (p.121) and in the 'drums of calamity' (p.46), imagery provides a kind of chorus commentary on the dilemma of the

peasant who, deprived of his way of life, is defenceless and without identity against the Kali of industrialisation.

Complementary to the peasant novel, as we have seen, are novels which expose the dehumanisation of the caste system and urban poverty.

Whereas Anand's Untouchable was a case-history of the Thirties, the central character in Kamala Markandaya's A Handful of Rice Ravi, is a proletarian product of the Fifties. The educated son of a peasant, Ravi tries to find for himself a decent way of life in the city where he is an 'outsider', without caste, in a no man's land between coolie and clerk. But, belonging to the generation of angry young men who rebel against the 'it is the will of God' attitude of subservience, he has the initiative to fight for a niche in society and becomes a tailor and householder. Ultimately, however, he is forced by socio-economic oppression to recede back into his inherited destiny as naturalistic victim. His only possible escape—employment with a former associate, Damodar, who has hoarded black market grain—is morally repugnant to him. He preserves his integrity at the cost of his family's suffering, alienation from them, and the suffocation of his passionate rebellious democratic spirit.

Kamala Markandaya defines this urban moral chaos in terms of a conventional image, Upton Sinclair's Darwinian man-made jungle:

...life was a battle in which the weak always went under; he accepted the fact that the man who did not do all he could to keep on top was a fool.[61]

Thus 'the terror' for Ravi 'of losing his identity in an indifferent city...was akin to death' (p.23). While contemplating reversion to the role of 'outsider who had opted to come out' and to declaring war on 'the forces that grudged him a living' (p.202), all he really wants is the 'decency of a fair reward for his work' (p.203). The dilemma is a sociologically tragic one precisely because morally acceptable opportunities are denied him, not because he is unworthy, but because society is impersonal and ruthless. In fact, his rejection of Damodar's offer is ethically heroic under the circumstances.

This is indicative of the way the question of 'how, if possible, can a man control his destiny?' is raised in A Handful of Rice. Kamala Markandaya provides Ravi with an opportunity—Damodar's offer—which is denied most people in his situation. Although Ravi's fundamental decency prompts his refusal, whether this implies that most people in his situation would have acted likewise remains an intriguing question. On the other hand, while it is true that Ravi has a choice, it is also true that free-will in this situation operates morally only in a life-denying way.

61 A Handful of Rice, Hamish Hamilton, 1966, p.11.

Thus Ravi demonstrates how tenuous identity derived from fundamental decency is in adverse sociological circumstances.

Moreover, Ravi's dilemma is not merely a special case; underlying it is the dilemma that is India, suffering so ineradicable that you pretend it isn't there:

> ...his upbringing had taught him to focus inward, upon the constant light within, to see the raging obscenities and miseries of their life as essentially external and ephemeral; and for all that he angrily repudiated this teaching, shreds of it obstinately clung... (p.109)

The ambivalence of A Handful of Rice in repudiating 'this teaching', while showing that it is the best the honest poor can achieve, reveals the intensity of the novel's mood of hopelessness. Noticeably Kamala Markandaya does not offer the characteristic Hindu philosophical answer to the problem. The novel ends with Ravi thwarted, despairing, weary. The salvation that was possible for Dandekar and Valmiki is denied him. The difference is sociological.

Some Inner Fury, however, is a different case again. Here the dilemma of identity is seen, not in terms of urban poverty, but against the political background of the Independence struggle as it entered a violent phase.

Some Inner Fury has a respectable place in the literature of Independence which was discussed in an earlier chapter.

This literature is not merely a tribute to the spirit of national heroism, nor a history of extraordinary self-sacrifice and moral discipline. It is also a record of the suffering, disillusionment and tragedy that is always part of any revolutionary movement, of the predicaments of identity (to which community do you belong? which side are you on?) which made the achievement of an Indian national identity so difficult. K.A. Abbas, for example, asks how identity on the basis of community, Hindu or Muslim, can be morally meaningful in view of the communal violence which occurred prior to and during Partition. His "The Man Who Did Not Want to Remember" is a story about an Indian who was wounded on the India-Pakistan border and lost his memory. He symbolises the general loss of identity in India at that time:

Not only I but many others have tried to establish my identity—my caste, my religion, my name! [62]

Unable to declare himself, firstly to a Muslim and then to a Hindu, he is mortally wounded by both. Just

62 Cages of Freedom and Other Stories, Hind Kitabs, Bombay, 1952, p.78.

before he dies he remembers who he is. His revenge is not to reveal this. Being human is the only identity that matters.

In Some Inner Fury, on the other hand, the frames of reference are not religious allegiances but Indian or English, revolutionary or government, allegiances. The theme is the tragic precipitation by an all-encompassing political situation of disunity and catastrophe in personal relationships. The group involved is Mira (the narrator), her step-brother Govind, her natural brother Kitsamy, his wife Premala, and the young Englishman Richard Marlow. Mira and Richard are in love. In normal circumstances, the author implies, they could have overcome the racial barriers though these are by no means ignored:

> The conventions of his caste were no less rigid than mine: he came of a race which had acquired an empire, to which the people at home were largely indifferent, and of which the people on the spot were largely ignorant—and, indeed, often confessed to this ignorance in accents of achievement...[63]

Moreover, circumstances which make taking sides inevitable conspire against them:

> You belong to one side, if you don't you belong to the other....There is no in between. You have shown your badge....it was there in your face, the colour of

[63] Some Inner Fury, The Harborough Publishing Co., 1960, p.88. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

your skin, the accents of your speech, in the clothes on your back. You didn't ask to be there? Ah, but you had no option... (p.121)

As Kitsamy, a magistrate, declares himself on the side of the Government, and Govind becomes a terrorist, and Premala devotes herself to the village school which the missionary Hickey is building, each has taken a side inimical to the others, and each retires into a separate or hostile remoteness. Mira and Richard are unable to escape the diminishing circle of violence that engulfs them all and metamorphoses relationships:

...everyone I knew was changing, as if a miasma were abroad in the air, evil, inescapable; and those you had thought to understand moved to strange hostile regions where you could not follow and looked upon the face of violence and when they turned again you no longer recognized them. (p.94)

Premala is burned to death when terrorists set fire to the school; Govind, Kitsamy and Mira arrive too late to save her; Kitsamy is murdered and Hickey insanely accuses Govind whose innocence Mira can prove; there is a trial which is never concluded and the novel ends with the mob storming in and carrying Govind off. Mira realises that she is destined to follow the Indian movement and that Richard must 'stay behind'; 'the forces that pulled us apart were too strong' (p.158). The situation is rather contrived and somewhat melodramatic. Never-

theless, it clearly illustrates Kamala Markandaya's preoccupation with the nature of human identities, which, in Some Inner Fury, are arranged in a violent geometry of intimacy and disintegration. What prevailed in the end was a mob identity that is now part of history:

> But these were not people any more, this was a mob, to which each human being within it had surrendered his personality to create a new giant identity, the blind, unreasoning, powerful, exultant, inhuman identity of a mob. (p.157)

Between the agitated participation of the mob and the philosophic detachment of the Swamy, the privations of India and the predacity of the W st, the novels of Kamala Markandaya comprise a wide-ranging awareness of the determinants of, and threats to, identity. The sense of identity in her work is noticeably most affirmative in the 'philosophical' rather than the 'sociological' context, most positive after it has been tested against English values and pressures and most vulnerable when confronted by internal Indian adversities of a sociological nature. However, her presentation of sociological issues is free from a false assumption of infallibility and from ideological tautology, faults which sometimes characterise the 'novel with a social purpose'. In fact probably Kamala Markandaya's most sustained characterisation is that of Ravi in A Handful of Rice. By comparison, perhaps the main flaw

in Possession is that Valmiki is not seen adequately from the inside, a defect which cannot be attributed wholly to the limitations of the spectator point of view. Whereas Valmiki's identity is realised as much theoretically as in actuality, Ravi's representatively Indian identity is realised per se and, is an effort of imagination, suggests a real coming to terms with contemporary India on the author's part. Thus, perhaps A Handful of Rice indicates the future direction of Kamala Markandaya's work.

IV R.K. NARAYAN

1 INTRODUCTORY: CHARACTER AND SETTING; COMIC AND SERIOUS FOCUSES

Since the late Fifties R.K. Narayan has emerged from critical neglect and South Indian obscurity and acquired (at least in the West) a solid literary reputation. An exception to this earlier poverty of recognition, however, was Graham Greene who, in his graceful introductions to The Bachelor of Arts (1937) and The Financial Expert (1952), compared Narayan to Chekhov and admired the Chekhovian way in which Narayan's characters, on the last page of each novel, 'vanish into life'.[1] A similar admiration is implicit in Edwin Gerow's recent comment that 'Narayan's is classical art'.[2] During the Fifties one or two enlightened devotees of Narayan arranged the publication of some of his novels in the U.S.A., but at first he only reached a small though cultivated audience. In

1 R.K. Narayan, The Financial Expert, New York, The Noonday Press, 1968, p.viiii. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

2 "The Quintessential Narayan", Literature East and West, 10, Nos. 1, 2 Winter/Spring 1966, p. 1.

England recognition occasionally filtered through The Times Literary Supplement until in 1958 Narayan became the subject of a feature article, "Well Met in Malgudi". The anonymous author of this article made the following claims:

> R.K. Narayan...has few equals among modern novelists....Although he has received consistent and generous praise from such critics as Mr. Graham Greene, Mr. E.M. Forster and Miss Elizabeth Bowen, it can still be fairly said that he has not won the general appreciation that he deserves. No one who has read one of Mr. Narayan's books can fail to have been impressed by its quality...[3]

This has been complemented since by reliable Indian reactions to the effect that Narayan's novels are authentically Indian. 'Few Indian writers have been more truly Indian', C.D. Narasimhaiah asserts.[4] Ved Mehta contends likewise:

> R.K. Narayan has no equal among the Indian novelists writing in English....he...manages by a miracle of perception and choice of detail to convey the Indian without a single false feeling or gesture.[5]

> ...his books...have the ring of true India in them. He had succeeded where his peers had failed, and this

3 The Times Literary Supplement, Friday May 9 1958, p.254.

4 "R.K. Narayan's 'The Guide'", The Literary Criterion, Summer 1961, P. 66.

5 "Indian Host", Saturday Review, Vol.XLIV, March 11, 1961, p.29.

without relying on Anglicized Indians or British caricatures to people his novels.[6]

Most respectable criticism of Narayan treats him, in William Walsh's words, as 'a writer of...character and maturity'.[7] K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar states:

Narayan's gifts as a writer are out of the ordinary: he wields so difficult and 'alien' a language like English with masterful ease, and conveys subtle shades of feeling and thought....He is a master of comedy...[8]

Interpreting Narayan's work in the context of traditional India, V. Panduranga Rao authoritatively backs up the following claims:

...Narayan is a writer with a full commitment to certain spiritual and religious values and ideas, with which Indians are normally familiar. Narayan's vision is essentially moral, for the problems he sets himself to resolve in his novels are largely ethical. This is not to underplay the comic irony of an artist much admired by critics in the west: on the contrary, it is his comic vitality that humanizes Narayan's grand vision. The elusive charm of his success is the direct result of a rare combination of comic sense and religious sensibility.[9]

6 "Profiles: The Train Had Just Arrived at Malgudi Station", The New Yorker XXXVIII 30 (15 Sept.1962),p.51.
7 "Sweet Mangoes and Malt Vinegar: the Novels of R.K. Narayan" in A Human Idiom, Chatto & Windus, 1964,p.128.
8 Indian Writing in English, p.300.
9 "The Art of R.K. Narayan", The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, July 1968 no.5, p.29.

The above anthology of praise is well-merited and gives some indication of Narayan's distinctive characteristics. It also provides an idea of the critical criteria which are applicable to his work, as well as suggesting some of the reasons why Narayan has been regarded to date as India's foremost novelist in English. At the moment his only serious rival, in this regard, would seem to be Raja Rao, whose fictional technique and interests are quite different from Narayan's. Yet both writers have in common a profound and discriminating reverence for those ancient traditions which they find to be still culturally and morally vital. To attempt to choose between R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao is somewhat critically precious; they are enjoyably readable for validly different reasons.

Narayan is a very dedicated writer, though not in the same sense that Mulk Raj Anand is. Whereas Anand's vision of life is based on a promulgated set of political, social and economic commitments, Narayan relies very much on artistic intuition, on a feeling for the appropriate gesture, attitude, action or remark whereby a character's individuality is realised. Malgudi, the fictional setting for virtually all Narayan's stories, is populous with examples. A host spring randomly to mind:

The astrologer who said things that pleased and astonished everyone and whose mystical psychology was based on shrewd guesswork and the realisation that 'mankind's troubes' could be analysed in terms of 'marriage, money, and the tangles of human ties';[10] the postman who knows everyone's business and 'was part and parcel of their existence, their hopes, aspirations, and activities';[11] the "Talkative Man" who is an irrepressible raconteur, a jack of all trades who once bought the municipal statue of Sir Frederick Lawley; the idiot who was teased into believing that a Madras film star was his intended bride; Mani who forever failed his school exams yet 'secretly pitied his classmates' because he believed he got valuable hints from the school clerk who was reputed to be 'omniscient' and to know 'all the question papers of all the classes';[12] Swaminathan's Granny who, when her grandson disappears, prays for his safe return to the God of the Thirupathi Hills, then when Swami reappears prepares to make offerings to the God 'to whom alone she owed the safe return of the child';[13] Ramani, whose executive and amorous pretensions are epitomised by the way he keeps his best ties pressed between the Encyclopaedia Brittanica and the Works of Byron; Savitri, who rebels

10 The title story in An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1947, p.3.
11 "The Missing Mail", An Astrologer's Day, p.9.
12 Swami and Friends, East Lansing, The Michigan State College Press, 1954, pp.54,52. All subsequent page references are to this edition.
13 ibid., p.170.

against Ramani's bullying and indifference by running away from home and prematurely attempting to enter the Hindu third stage of life; Savitri's cook whose perennial excuse for being late for work is that "No two clocks agree" and who tells his mistress that if she wants him to be punctual she should buy him a watch;[14] Margayya who, in business matters and human affairs, 'had always a notion that to get anything done one had to go in a round-about manner and arrive at the point without the knowledge of the other party';[15] Dr. Pal—journalist, correspondent and author—who had written four books, one on paper and three in his head; the 'star' Madras lawyer in The Guide who presented Raju's case 'as a sort of comedy in three acts';[16] Vasu, the pugnacious taxidermist whose unkempt hair formed a black halo and whose violent character and philosophy are summed up in such remarks as "I challenge any man to contradict me" and "More people will have to die on the roads, if our nation is to develop any road sense at all!";[17] and Jagan, the 'Sweet Vendor', who for years idolised and

14 The Dark Room, Bombay, Pearl Publications, 1960, p.8. All subsequent page references are to this edition.
15 The Financial Expert, p.107.
16 Methuen, 1958, p.200. All subsequent page references are to this edition.
17 The Man-eater of Malgudi, Heinemann, 1963, pp.17,33. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

indulged his son but finally retreats from the world, leaving his son to extricate himself from jail and solve his own problems. These, then, are some of Malgudi's inhabitants—all real people, authentically Indian and distinguishable as individuals because of their peculiarities and idiosyncrasies.

Character and the human element, as is suggested by the protagonistic titles of most of Narayan's novels, are at the heart of his fiction. Narayan commented truly when he told Roland E. Wolseley "my focus is all on character":

> "I can write best when I do not plan the subject too elaborately....All I can settle for myself is my protagonist's general type of personality—my focus is all on character. If his personality comes alive, the rest is easy for me: background and minor characters develop as I progress."[18]

Chandran (The Bachelor of Arts), Krishnan (Grateful to Life and Death), Margayya (The Financial Expert), Raju (The Guide), and Jagan (The Sweet Vendor) testify to this dominance of the central characters in Narayan's novels. Most of his characters have been created by a combined process of imaginative gestation and careful observation of people Narayan has seen around him.

When asked by Hans Beerman how he selected the characters in his novels and short stories, and whether they were local, Narayan replied:

18 "Narayan of India", The Nation, XVII 4, 3 Oct.1953, p.274.

"They are partially based on local Mysore folk and acquaintances of mine—but not wholly. I often build them up. However, I make no deliberate studies. Still, Mysore is a small enough place that lends itself to acute observation. It seems to me that more eccentric people live here than elsewhere...."[19]

To Ved Mehta, Narayan reported that he sometimes felt like Raju, "especially when I'm telling about Mysore", and 'added that some family incidents and his own character had given him the conception of Raju...and that Rosie...and her husband, Marco...had a similar genesis'.[20]

In Narayan's fiction, therefore, there is a close correlation between life and art, and this is one of the main reasons why he is not merely an author of delightful comic entertainments. He seriously observes life in its main aspects—funny, sad, incongruous, ironic, absurd, tender, holy, and eccentric. Grateful to Life and Death is largely autobiographical, while it seems likely that Narayan shares with many of his characters their tendency, through some irrepressible quirk of character, to become involved in other people's affairs. Part of

19 "Two Indian Interviews", Books Abroad, (Summer 1965), p.293.
20 "The Train Had Just Arrived at Malgudi Station", p.79.

Narayan's working day is in fact devoted to keeping acute his powers of observation and understanding of people. 'He considers his morning walk his office hours, because he stops and talks to people, many of whom chat with him freely about their doings or their troubles...he observes their ways closely.'[21] As with Raju, it is 'in his nature to get involved in other people's interests and activities'.[22]

To Narayan, the relative absence of privacy in India, and the human tendency to regard private affairs as a matter of public interest and concern, result in excellent novel material. Raju is just one of many characters whose life is one of tangled involvement with 'other people's interests and activities': there is the postman who, in "The Missing Mail", withholds a telegram concerning a death so as not to spoil a wedding; the 'cousin' in The Sweet Vendor who spends all his time dealing with complications in the lives of his numerous friends, with each of whom he claims some family connection; and there is Vasu, the 'man-eater', whose 'nature would not let him leave anyone in peace',[23] and who represents the menacing, interfering side of involvement. In the portrayal of

21 ibid., p.78.
22 The Guide, p.8.
23 The Man-eater of Malgudi, p.27.

Gandhi in Waiting for the Mahatma Narayan shows how the moral and human greatness of the Mahatma was evident in the warm way in which he involved himself with thousands of ordinary people (children, untouchables, young lovers, etc.) and maintained a personal interest in the lives of numerous individuals.

Typical of the group's assumed prorogative of intervention in the individual's private concerns, on the other hand, is the scene in The Financial Expert in which Margayya, justifiably annoyed, punishes Balu for consigning an account-book to oblivion down a torrential gutter. A crowd quickly gathers and perversely regards Margayya's son as something of a hero. The scene is worth quoting at length because it is a splendid example of the way Narayan astutely conveys the quick psychological succession of events whereby Margayya is stripped of his parental authority by a collection of individuals, whose main concern seems to be to assert over the harrassed Margayya the superiority of their moral sensibilities and experience of life:

> Someone dragged away the child crying: "Save the child from this ruffian." Another said: "He would have pushed the child into the gutter." A woman with a basket came forward to ask: "Are you a heartless demon? How can you beat such a small child?" She flung down her basket and picked up the child on her arm. Balu copiously sobbed on her shoulder. Another woman tried to take him from her, commenting: "Only those who bear the child for ten months in the womb know how precious it is. Men are always like this."

Someone objected to this statement; it turned out to be the man holding the cycle, who retorted with great warmth: "Boys must be chastized; otherwise do you want them to grow up into devils?" Margayya looked at him gratefully. Here at last was a friend in this absolutely hostile world. He swept his arms to address all the women and the gathering: "It's all very well for you to talk....But he has thrown in there an important account book. What am I to do without it?"

"How can a baby know anything about account books and such things? God gives children to those who don't deserve them"

"You should not have kept it within his reach. You must always be prepared for such things where there are children."

A washerwoman, who had come forward, said: "You were childless for twelve years, and prayed to all the Gods and went to Thirupathi; was it only for this?"

"What have I done?" Margayya asked pathetically. He was beginning to feel very foolish. Society was pressing in upon him from all sides...everyone seemed to have a right to talk to him as they pleased....The lone cyclist was hardly an adequate support on which to lean. Margayya turned and looked for him. He too was gone....Margayya knew that the little boy would not let his sympathizers go until they took him to the shop across the road and bought him pepperminta.

The crowd turned away and was now following Balu, and Margayya felt relieved that they were leaving him alone. He broke a twig off an avenue tree, and vaguely poked it into the gutter and ran the stick from end to end. He only succeeded in raising a stench. A schoolmaster who passed that way advised: "Call a scavenger and ask him to look for it. He'll have the proper thing with him for poking here. Don't try to do everything yourself." Margayya obediently dropped the stick into the drain, reflecting, "No one will let me do what I like." He turned to go back into his house. He climbed his steps with bowed head, because his brother's entire family was ranged along the wall on the other side.

He quickly passed in. When he was gone they commented: "Something is always agitating that household and creating a row." Margayya went straight into the kitchen, where his wife was cooking, ignorant of all that had happened, and told her: "The folk in the next house seem to have no better business than to hang about to see what is going on here....Do they ever find the time to cook, eat or sleep?" This was a routine question needing no reply from his wife. She merely asked: "Where is the child?" "Probably rolling in the gutter," he answered wearily. "What has come over you?" she asked. "You don't seem to be in your senses since last night."

"I'm not. And if you try to imply that I have been drinking or spending the night in a brothel, I leave you to think so — — " (pp.34-5)

This scene illustrates a multiplicity of Narayan's characteristics and talents as a novelist, and his portrayal in it of people spontaneously involving themselves in the affairs of others indicates how thoroughly he focuses on character. While Margayya's predicament, attitudes and feelings are shown to be completely human and central to the scene, it is the skilful manner in which Narayan portrays Margayya in relation to the group which makes the characterisation so convincing and true to life. Of course, for an individual's personality to be seen whole and three-dimensional, he has to be presented not only in isolation but also in the context of his social environment. Yet this obvious necessity both of life

and novelistic characterisation would seem to apply even more to the Indian novelist than to many western writers. Compared with English or Australian societies, the impinging influences of the Indian social environment upon the individual are usually more constant, pervasive and inescapable; partly as a consequence, perhaps, the pattern of ascetic withdrawal and renunciation of normal social ties (as Narayan demonstrates in The Guide and at the end of The Sweet Vendor) is a tradition-sanctioned form of mature behaviour.

At any rate, it is clear from the above scene in The Financial Expert that Narayan's focus on character depends to an important extent upon his keen observation of the social scene and of Indian group psychology. Underlying his presentation of that episode is an implied acknowledgement of social background and various conventions or idiosyncrasies of social behaviour. For instance, the schoolmaster's advisory command provides not only a humorous ironic aside on the technocratic society, but also amusingly implies that Margayya is improperly inflicting on himself a loss of caste by doing a job which should be done only by untouchables. Other elements in the situation which reveal the deftness and accuracy of Narayan's observation of human behaviour are the washerwoman's righteous announce-

ment concerning Margayya's domestic history, Balu's cunning exploitation of the turn of events, and the comic inversion of roles whereby Balu triumphs and Margayya is reduced to the status of a child complaining "No one will let me do what I like". Also characteristically Narayan, as well as Indian, is the fashion in which Margayya's conduct becomes a matter of public debate and the cyclist defends the honour of the male species but invisibly withdraws when he realises that Margayya is fighting a losing battle. Margayya's verbal transference of his frustrated anger to his relations and wife is a realistic instance of a common psychological phenomenon. And included in this is a further subtlety: that, ironically, Margayya in other circumstances is just as prone to interfere in other people's affairs and make public judgements about them. Indeed, to Margayya in his role as money-lender under the banyan tree, such interference is a fundamental creed of business.

The reference in the above scene to the relations existing between Margayya's family and his brother's provides a further example of the Indian context of Narayan's focus on character. He once remarked:

"I fear that the rich subjective life of an individual against the background of that unique institution, the joint family system, is a subject that has not been properly tackled....There is wonderful material here, whether the setting be the earlier political struggle

or the present-day political achievement."[24]

Many of Narayan's characters are revealed partly in the light of this 'background'. Margayya, Nataraj and Jagan are main characters who have been involved in the filial animosities, formation of factions, and legal wrangling that resulted from the break-up of the joint family. In each case, when the head of the family died, the estate which had been held intact for generations was plundered, fought over, and divided into lots in every conceivable way. Thus Margayya and his brother had literally cut in half their family home and possessions, and subsequently lived together in a state of tenuous partition and variable ill-feeling. Given their history, such close proximity breeds curiosity, suspicion, frank outspoken frictions, and fervent claims to family pride and honour. However, it is interesting to note that in times of adversity Margayya's brother and sister-in-law exude solicitude and practical help and are motivated by a complex combination of factors: genuine sympathy; family loyalty; a feeling of importance and a vicarious desire to be involved in the catastrophe in question; a sense of their indispensability; and also a conviction that the mis-

24 Roland E. Wolseley, "Narayan of India", p.274.

fortune is proof of their own better sense, superior moral insight, and strict adherence to fundamental values and orthodox principles of conduct.

The tensions which can underlie apparent generosity and disinterested concern are well illustrated by the scene in The Financial Expert in which Margayya and his wife receive a card from Madras informing them (incorrectly as it later turned out) that Balu was dead. The calamity is instantly a communal and family matter, with a host of people satisfying their curiosity and comforting Margayya's wife. She accuses Margayya of ruining Balu, whereupon he thinks he may have treated Balu too harshly because of repeated examination failures. With great mental alacrity Margayya transfers the blame to the British: 'examinations...were a curse on the youth of the nation, the very greatest menace that the British had brought with them to India' (p.127). When Margayya bewilderingly asks if anyone knows what happened to his son wild conjectures, asserted with an air of certainty, fly at him from all directions. 'Several voices chorused: "He fell off a fourth floor of a building in Madras," "He must have been run over in that city," "Probably caught cholera"' (p.128). Margayya's brother's solicitude, however, prompts a new chain of thought:

Through all his grief a ridiculous question (addressed to his brother) kept coming to his mind: "Are we friends now—no longer enemies? What about our feud? A part of his mind kept wondering how they could live as friends, but the numerous problems connected with this seemed insoluble. "We had got used to this kind of life. Now I suppose we shall have to visit each other and enquire and so on..." All that seemed to be impossible to do. He wished to tell him then and there: "Don't let this become an excuse to change our present relationship."

Margayya did his best to suppress all these thoughts....His brother whispered among other things: "We will send you the night meal from our house."

"No, we don't want any food tonight," Margayya said. "Please send all those people away." He was indignant. Because Balu was dead, why should this crowd imagine that the house was theirs?...

"No," Margayya thundered with deadly irony in his tone. "How can they leave? How can they afford to ignore all this fun and go? If an entrance be charged — —" he began, then stopped, for in his condition he realized that he ought not to complete his sentence, which ran: "We might earn lakhs — —" He did not think it was a good statement to make.... On the fringe of the crowd someone was muttering: "When are they bringing the body?"

Margayya never knew till now that he had so many well-wishers in the city. The next day they proposed to bundle him off to Madras. He seemed to have no choice in the matter....

...When there was a pause and his eyes fell upon a little object, the lacquer-painted wooden elephant that Balu had played with as a child, it sent a sharp stab down his heart; it made him wince, he choked at the throat, and the tears came down in a rush, involuntarily—but he was spared more of that experience by the people around him. He almost regretted that his brother and his family were now back in the fold: they seemed to think up a new proposition for him every minute...

His brother added: "If you are afraid to go to Madras alone, I will go with you...."

"Here is this man," Margayya at once reflected, "wangling a free journey to Madras." And the prospect of his brother's constant company for so many days appalled him. Lest the women folk and others should follow up the idea, he hastily said: Don't worry, I will go myself...."

He suddenly saw it as a beautiful opportunity to escape. (pp.128-31)

Again in this scene Narayan focuses on character with consummate craft by showing the psychological impact the tragic event has on the people concerned, Margayya in particular. The author's comic sense is evident in the deliberate disproportion he effects between the hysteria, involvement, clamour and shock of the characters, and his own amused understanding detachment; between the sadness and the comedy which, as Narayan observes, are sometimes incongruously blended in life's unexpected moments; and between the characters' belief that Balu is dead, and the author's withheld knowledge that Balu is contentedly alive. Narayan makes expert comic use of his omniscience, while realistically observing how people behave in this kind of situation. His presentation of Margayya's reactions, thought associations, and pet obsessions is achieved unsentimentally and with remorseless honesty. Particularly true to life are the uncontrollable intrusions in Margayya's mind of thoughts which, at such a time, he guiltily acknowledges to be unworthy and improper; yet, at the same time, it is equally credible

that he should seek refuge, in various rationalisations, from the painful and irritating commotion about him, from his fear that he failed Balu, from his conviction that it was 'most unhappy to have been the father of Balu' (p.130), and from the unbearable consciousness of what his son's death truly means to him. As Margayya's two main interests in life are his son and money, it is utterly in keeping with his character that, on his journey to Madras to collect Balu's body, he should travel 3rd class and 'suddenly' feel 'that he had kept away too long from the thought of money' (p.134).

As the above scene indicates, filial relationships are a key aspect of most of Narayan's characterisations. Like Margayya, Jagan of The Sweet Vendor has centred on his son Mali much of his life and nearly all his affection. Like Balu, Mali is an only child. Mali's mother died when he was a small boy, leaving Mali dismayed and puzzled.

> ...Jagan never got over the memory of that moment; the coarse, raw pain he had felt at the sight of Mali on that fateful day remained petrified in some vital centre of his being. From that day, the barrier had come into being. The boy had ceased to speak to him normally.[25]

Both fathers are blindly devoted to their sons and spoil them excessively; both are disappointed by their

25 The Sweet Vendor, The Bodley Head, 1967, pp.43-4. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

sons' failings and indifference to them; both repress their disappointment until finally it erupts in a decisive act which at last released them from hurtful attachments—from the bondage of their filial love. The sons do not want the business inheritance their fathers offer them; they only want the money that will enable them to go their own ways. Thus Margayya and Jagan learn the lesson that the "law of life", which cannot be avoided, is a "profound unmitigated loneliness";[26] and learn to accept the wisdom of the Hindu philosophy of life and attitude to human ties. Thus, at the end of The Sweet Vendor Jagan enters the third stage of the Hindu life pattern by renouncing his existence as a businessman and domesticated parent and by leaving home to devote the rest of his life to meditation and the erection of a temple. The end of The Financial Expert, on the other hand, with Margayya turning his attentions to his grandson and preparing to begin over again under the banyan tree, implies that the financial and filial passions in his nature are incurable and will never be renounced.

The general situation is very familiar. Narayan's skill and originality lie in his technique of individualising and personalising the theme of the dubious alliance of money and affection, and in the unobtrusive way in which he locates character within a meaningful frame of traditional reference.

26 Grateful to Life and Death, The Michigan State College Press, 1953, p.203. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

Whereas Margayya's dedication to money, his cunning and ruthlessness in business, are part of the tough-minded, resilient, hard side of his character, his love for Balu belongs to his other, very human and vulnerable side. The same is roughly true of Jagan, who in business tries to reconcile self-interest with high-minded Gandhian principles. For both Margayya and Jagan, coming home each evening means the thrill of seeing their sons. As children Balu and Mali were adept at getting their own way. Balu 'levied an exacting penality on his parents' (p.10) whenever he was dissatisfied with them or with life, while his bad behaviour is regarded as 'enchanting self-assertiveness' (p.25). The fathers delude themselves with aristocratic visions of their sons' successful futures and fuss over their education and health. Margayya instals a home tutor; Jagan obsessively concocts 'natural' diets for Mali. Margayya also takes charge of the school Balu attends by taking the place of a School Board member whom he persuades to retire. 'On the day he admitted Balu to the school he realized that his son would not have a chance of survival unless he admitted himself also to the school'; as a result, Balu 'never lost his place in the class, and the teachers seemed to have adjusted themselves to his way of thinking' (p.88).

In both The Financial Expert and The Sweet-Vendor, excessive parental pride, ironically, is totally un-

matched by the child's performances. Although Balu's marks in almost all subjects were in single digits', Margayya believes with fanatical optimism that Balu's best result (12% in Hygiene) indicates that his son 'was destined to be a doctor' (p.117). When Mali quits College with the intention of being a writer, Jagan doggedly compensates for his disappointment by believing in his son's literary genius even though Mali fails to produce a single line. Immensely practical in business, when it comes to their sons Margayya and Jagan are completely carried away by their imaginations.

The filial breach quickly widens. Neither parent has been able to get through to his adolescent son. Each depends on intermediaries—Margayya on his wife and the tutor, and Jagan on the cousin. Balu runs away from homeand Mali goes to America to study creative writing. However, Narayan's handling of this theme of the failure of the older and younger generations to communicate with and understand each other is not at all hackneyed, mainly because the discrepancy between the father's pride and naivety and the son's ingratitude and selfishness is credible. How well and amusingly the psychology of the doting parent is captured in Jagan's delight in Mali's aerogrammes, the superiority he feels at having a son in the U.S., and his passion for directing conversations with all and sundry to the subject of America. Ironically, Jagan is most indignant that 'all the others in the town were obsessed with their

own notions, and were ignorant on the subject of America' (pp.59-60). 'Gradually his reading of the Bhagavad Gita was replaced by the blue airmail letters. From their study he formed a picture of America and was able to speak with authority on the subject of American landscape, culture and civilisation...he even stopped the vagrant on the culvert one day in order to describe the Grand Canyon' (p.61). The implied incongruity in the association of the culvert with the Grand Canyon is characteristic of Narayan's delight in humorous innuendo.

The father-son and in-law relationships, examined in the preceding commentary, indicate how much the complexities of human ties contribute to Narayan's art of character portrayal. Other relationships which he explores with comparable perspicacity, and in relation to Indian values and conventions, are the following: the alliances, friendships and enmities of childhood (Swami and Friends); a purely innocent form of romantic love (The Bachelor of Arts); the growth of young romantic love into real harmonious consummation (Waiting for the Mahatma); the ludicrous or vain attempts by men to romanticise adultery (The Dark Room, The Printer of Malgudi, The Guide); the sad failures and deep satisfactions of arranged marriages (The Dark Room and Grateful to Life and Death respectively); the intimate bonds between child, parent and grandparent (Grateful to

Life and Death); the complicated encounter between active and passive types (The Man-eater of Malgudi); and the extraordinary power of love and devotion which was the basis of Gandhi's relationship with his people (Waiting for the Mahatma).

This diversity of human experience and Narayan's compassionate but objective understanding of it constitute a mature moral vision which is vitalised by Narayan's technique of comedy and given depth by his acceptance of traditional and religious values, which, at various points in his narratives, place his characters in moral relief.[27] His comedy discriminates between the abiding and the absurd: thus while Narayan gently satirises some peculiar, pretentious or hypocritical attachments to traditional customs, or displays some of the absurd incongruities which result from a crude attempt to fuse old India and western progress, he indicates time and again that for the modern Indian the traditional way provides the best guarantee of happiness and fulfilment. On the other hand, it would seem that Narayan's comic point of view implies that for the Indian to achieve such contentment he needs to be a bit of an eccentric

27 Cp. the critical acknowledgement of Narayan's moral seriousness (as well as his humane comedy) in the following articles: V. Panduranga Rao's "The Art of R.K. Narayan"; William Walsh's "Sweet Mangoes and Malt Vinegar" and "The Spiritual and the Practical" (a review of The Sweet-Vendor, The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, July 1968 no.5,pp.121-3; C.D. Narasimhaiah's "R.K. Narayan's 'The Guide'"; Edwin Gerow's "The Quintessential Narayan"; and my "R.K. Narayan's Grateful to Life and Death", The Literary Criterion, Vol.VIII No.3 Winter 1968, pp.52-64.

at heart. Another point that needs to be borne in mind is that Narayan's moral vision and profound humanism are not consciously or explicitly cultivated in his writing; they are incidentally and inherently part of his art of story-telling and of the cultural environment (Malgudi) which is the background for all his stories.

Narayan's art is an imitation of life—in the good uncomplicated sense of that phrase. An interesting confirmation of this in reverse was an experience Narayan had of life imitating his art in the case of Margayya, who was based on a real Mysore person. Narayan told Ved Mehta that although Margayya's career as a 'publisher and salesman of a pornographic book' was sheer invention, some time after the novel was published he saw the real-life Margayya hawking "two-anna obscene books" [28] hidden under film-tune leaflets.

Clearly the humane quality of Narayan's comedy owes a great deal to the attractiveness he finds in eccentric behaviour. Much of the humour in his work results from the discrepancy he reveals between the normal code and the eccentric's exaggerated dedication to it or deviation from it. Thus Margayya is thought to act most oddly when he gives up his work under the banyan tree and devotes his finances and energy to a month's full-time worship of the Goddess Lakshmi in the belief that he will thereby acquire wealth.

28 "The Train Had Just Arrived at Malgudi Station", p.72.

Many of Narayan's minor characters are vivid and memorable because of the eccentric singlemindedness with which they cultivate their special passions. Two of the best examples come from The Man-eater of Malgudi: The poet with his passion for monosyllables and the journalist who attributes to Nehru all the ills of the universe, society and the human race. Here is how Nataraj introduces the poet to the reader:

> Among my constant companions was a poet who was writing the life of God Krishna in monosyllabic verse. His ambition was to compose a grand epic, and he came almost every day to recite to me his latest lines. My admiration for him was unbounded. I was thrilled to hear such clear lines as 'Girls with girls did dance in trance', and I felt equally excited when I had to infer the meaning of certain lines; that happened when he totally failed to find a monosyllable and achieved his end by ruthlessly carving up a polysyllable. On such occasions even the most familiar term took on the mysterious quality of a private code. (pp.7-8)

With such clear witty succinctness Narayan beautifully captures the eccentric's excessive enthusiasm as well as the ironic paradox that his fanaticism for simplicity produces esoteric obscurity. But probably the grandest eccentricity of all is to be found in The Guide when Raju gives his life for a holy cause as a result of having committed himself to the role of a swami that has been thrust upon him and which he initially accepts for selfish and convenient reasons.

Just as a character's fate may be seen to conform to a traditional or archetypal pattern, Narayan does not hesitate to adapt Hindu concepts to his ideas about life and human behaviour. Thus while he happily accepts the metaphysics of Karma, he often shows his characters obtusely attempting to blame Fate for all kinds of happenings which have obvious explanations. It is not surprising, then, that Karma in Narayan's fiction is presented very much along the lines that character is fate. While, in a given instance, a character's misfortunes may be the result of his personality and innate perversity, equally his salvation may result from inner redeemable qualities.

In the short story, "Trail of the Green Blazer", however, Narayan gives an ironic twist to this idea, showing that life after all is not so simple. The main character is a pick-pocket, Raju. Like his author, he watches crowds with professional concentration. With expert care he selects his victim, in this story a man in a green blazer. Raju shadows the man, who buys a balloon and tells the shopkeeper (possibly as a bargaining point) that it is for a boy who is motherless. Soon afterwards Raju deftly relieves the man of his purse, confiscates the money, but is disturbed to discover he has stolen the balloon as well. Raju's redeeming virtue—his compassionate imagination—proves his downfall. Unable to bear the thought of a sobbing

motherless child deprived of his balloon Raju is caught attempting to slip the balloon back into 'Green Blazer's' pocket. His statement to the magistrate that he was only trying to put the purse back 'became a stock joke in the police world'.[29] The moral which concludes the story is nicely in keeping with the central irony:

> He served his term of 18 months and came back into the world—not quite decided what he should do with himself. He told himself: 'If ever I pick up something again, I shall make sure I don't have to put it back.' For now he believed God had gifted the likes of him with only one-way deftness. Those fingers were not meant to put anything back. (pp.18-9).

It is characteristic of Narayan that the core of "The Trail of the Green Blazer" is a moment of character revelation: the pity Raju feels in contradiction to his self-interest. Narayan psychologically dramatises this moment by showing Raju's imagination running away with him:

> ...he saw a balloon folded and tucked away....'What a fool to keep this in the purse,' Raju reflected. 'It is the carelessness of parents that makes young ones suffer,' he ruminated angrily. For a moment he paused over a picture of the growling father returning home and the motherless one waiting at the door for the promised balloon, and this growling man feeling for his purse...and, oh! it was too painful!

29 Lawley Road and Other Stories, Delhi, Hind Pocket Books (no date), p.18.

> Raju almost sobbed at the thought of the disappointed child—the motherless boy. There was no one to comfort him. Perhaps this ruffian would beat him if he cried too long. The Green Blazer did not look like one who knew the language of children. Raju was filled with pity at the thought of the young child—perhaps of the same age as his second son. Suppose his wife were dead...(personally it might make things easier for him, he need not conceal his cash under the roof), he overcame this thought as an unworthy side issue. If his wife should die it would make him very sad indeed and tax all his ingenuity to keep his young ones quiet....That motherless boy must have his balloon at any cost, Raju decided. (pp.17-8)

This is typically Narayan. Most of his characters have imaginations which indulge in dramas of compassion and catastrophe, and perform various feats of exaggeration, including the distortion or misinterpretation of actual situations. Such distortions provide ideal material for pathos and comedy without obliging Narayan to sacrifice accuracy of observation.

The above extract amusingly illustrates universal traits of character, particularly the way in which a wrong action (theft) is rationalised by moral indignation ('the carelessness of parents'), or the way high-mindedness (pity for the boy) may prompt unworthy self-interested imaginings (the beneficial consequence for Raju of his wife's death—though the thought of this quickly alerts him to the prospective disadvantages). Thus Narayan reveals simple difficult truths about man, such as the egoistic ramifications of moral disinterestedness, and the often-forgotten fact that consideration

for others involves putting oneself in another's place, which is hard to put into practice. And all this is managed with a reassuringly wise tone, a verbal smile, in which Raju's sentimental seriousness and moral anxiety are part of a sincere pose that the author simultaneously grins at and admires.

As we have seen from the foregoing discussion, The Financial Expert and "The Trail of the Green Blazer" illustrate the subtle combination of characterisation, comedy and reserved moral attitude which is to be found in nearly all of Narayan's work. Another element which contributes significantly to Narayan's art is his use of setting. Reality of place of course helps to create credibility of character; in this regard Malgudi has proved a most successful device, providing sociological verisimilitude and a vivid physical impression of South India. Readers of Narayan who have never been to India acquire from his writings a remarkable sense of familiarity with the country, without being conscious of his contriving or calculating such an effect. Narayan's responses to his Mysore surroundings are an essential part of his imaginative life—spontaneous currents on and beneath the surface of his narratives. As Nirmal Mukerji observes: 'It is through little offhand details thrown in here and there that he creates the illusion of the reality of his

setting'.[30]

Malgudi has often been compared to Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, relevantly with respect to the technical procedure of concentrating separate stories in the same setting. But it does not follow that the settings as such are similar, as Ved Mehta properly points out:

> ...Malgudi corresponds to Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. The resemblance, however, is remote, because Malgudi is an infinitely simpler place, and because its landmarks...all, from book to book, chaotically change their locations. Compared to Faulkner's spiritual home, Malgudi is quiet, dusty, and uneventful, lacking political and social problems, sexual outrages, and hundreds of other things, among them the fast-moving hands of the clock. The differences between the two places—one active and the other inactive, one doing and the other being—may have something to do with the essences of America and India. The dominant force in Malgudi is ineluctable fate, playing one ironic trick after another on the simple inhabitants, who rise and fall a little blandly as fortune dictates. But the bland cosmos of Malgudi is blessed with grace, because its people are innocent and comic—copies of Narayan, with his dazzling smile fixed on their faces.[31]

Possibly this description is too overloaded with quaintness and is as equally applicable to, say, Dylan Thomas's Milk Wood as Narayan's town. For, although

30 The World of Malgudi: A Study of the Novels of R.K. Narayan, Ann Arbor, University Microfilms, 1963, pp.15-6. For an account of Malgudi and Narayan's use of setting see pp.1-38.

31 "The Train Had Just Arrived at Malgudi Station", p.74.

Malgudi is 'a slow-moving peaceful town unruffled by the outside world',[32] many of its inhabitants are far from inactive while the question of their 'innocence' is not as simple as Ved Mehta implies. Take Vasu, for example. Admittedly he is an outsider, but nevertheless he epitomises the aggressiveness, extroversion and wilful evil-mindedness which is part of life everywhere—including Malgudi. Then again, Ramani may be susceptible to women, but his treatment of his wife is hardly innocent even if he conducts the affair with Shanta Bai naively. Men like Margayya, Raju and Nataraj are extraordinarily industrious, even if they do hanker after the bliss of social disengagement. However, though they physically attempt to disengage from the rat-race for a time, their busy burdened minds generally will not let them rest. Ironically, the quietude of the holy man's hermitage becomes for Raju the climax of his hectic public life and involvement with people, for he dies in the midst of milling noisy sightseers and massive TV publicity.

On the other hand, Malgudi does have an atmosphere of serenity, spiritual order, and a qualified assurance of man's essential goodness which complements the

32 Nirmal Mukerji, The World of Malgudi, p.10.

perturbations, chaos and human failings that are very much part of Malgudi's day-to-day life. This is acknowledged, for example, in The Printer of Malgudi by Srinivas, who believes that life and human relationships obey a cosmic law of 'balance':

> ...things being neither particularly wrong nor right, but just balancing themselves. Just the required number of wrongdoers as there are people who deserved wrong deeds, just as many policemen to bring them to their senses, if possible, and just as many wrongdoers again to keep the police employed, and so on and on in an infinite concentric circle.[33]

Although Narayan avoids philosophical abstractions, except as they are relevant to a given character's attitude to life, Malgudi (being characteristically Indian) is a metaphysical idea as well as a geographical place. Legend and history permeate the physical setting. "I can't write a novel without Krishna, Ganesa, Hanuman, astrologers, temples, devadasis, or temple prostitutes", Narayan has remarked; "...that has turned out to be my India."[34] The Thirupathi and Mempi Hills and the River Sarayu are Malgudi's spiritually-meaningful equivalents of the Himalayas and the Ganges. The Thirupathi Hills are presided over by a local deity, while the Sarayu is an ancient

33 Michigan State University Press, 1957, p.76. All subsequent page references are to this edition.
34 Ved Mehta, "A Train Had Just Arrived at Malgudi Station", p.54.

river which was created by Sri Ram Chandra, an incarnation of Vishnu, when he scratched a line in the sand with an arrow. We see from The Man-eater of Malgudi and other stories that, for the town's older generation, the river has sacred significance. To rise at four and go to the river to perform ablutions is an immemorial religious ritual. But to the Malgudi younger set of The Bachelor of Arts, for instance, the banks of the river are meant for relaxation, conversation and romance. In Waiting for the Mahatma Gandhi's admiration of the Sarayu relates to his advocacy of living in sacramental accord with such surroundings in order to achieve inner harmony, just as he chooses to stay in the untouchable colony instead of a Lawley Extension mansion partly to set a moral example to Malgudians.

Beyond Nallappa's Grove is a decaying temple with a lotus pond, surrounded by casuarinas and a thick snake-infested undergrowth. We are told in Grateful to Life and Death that it is believed the temple was erected by Sri Sankara when he passed that way one ancient evening; he chanted the name of a Goddess and the structure formed in stone out of the syllables. Presumably it is the same temple which provides the setting in The Financial Expert for Margayya's momentous meeting with Dr. Pal, and in The Sweet-Vendor with Jagan's similarly significant meeting with Pandit Chinna Dorai. Further evidence

of the Malgudi district's venerable past is to be found in the Mempi Hills, which are of archaeological interest, as Marco's research and publications prove in The Guide.

Malgudi also bears the signs of the impact of more recent history, particularly British rule. Nirmal Mukerji comments:

> With the ancient river Sarayu...on one end, and the westernised Lawley Extension area on the other, Malgudi seems to be a curious mixture of the traditionalist East and the ever-changing West. Like the rest of India it is in a state of slow transition. It is changing, no doubt, but unwillingly. It can neither reject nor accept the modern ideas.[35]

Thus, in The Bachelor of Arts, Chandran's parents try to reconcile the convention of the arranged marriage and comparison of horoscopes with their son's desire to marry the girl of his choice; while in The Printer of Malgudi an elaborate religious ritual is necessary to inaugurate in Malgudi a new twentieth-century god—the movie camera.

During the chronological course of the novels Malgudi grows from a small town in the early years of the present century into a small city of to-day. Raju's father prospers when the railway comes to Malgudi. The town acquires a night life when modern

35 The World of Malgudi, p.2.

entertainments are introduced; the 'Palace Talkies' succeeds the silent movies era, while the town even experiences Hollywood first-hand when "Sunrise Pictures" is founded and De Mello is brought from America to direct their first film. The influences of British rule upon education, administration, and the economy are evident in such institutions as the Albert Mission College (Brown, the Principal, is English); the municipal council system (Lawley Road and a lead statue commemorate the memory of an English administrator); and the Engladia Banking Corporation whose manager is a John Bull figure, Edward Schilling.

The opening of The Financial Expert provides a superb example of how the Malgudi setting, as an incongruous blending of traditional India and the modern west, is fundamental to the presentation and understanding of character:

> From time immemorial people seemed to have been calling him "Margayya"..."Marga" meant "The Way" and "Ayya" was an honorific suffix: taken together it denoted one who showed the way. He showed the way out to those in financial trouble. And in all those villages that lay within a hundred-mile radius of Malgudi, was there anyone who could honestly declare that he was not in financial difficulties? The emergence of Margayya was an unexpected and incalculable offshoot of a co-operator's zeal. This statement will be better understood if we watch him in his setting a little more closely.
>
> One of the proudest buildings in Malgudi was the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank, which was built in the year 1914 and named after a famous Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Sir - -, who had been knighted for his devotion to Co-operation after he had, in fact,

lost his voice explaining co-operative principles to peasants in the village at one end and to officials in charge of the files at the Secretariat end. It was said that he died while serving on a Rural Indebtedness Sub-committee. After his death it was discovered that he had left all his savings for the construction of the bank. He now watched, from within a teak frame suspended on the central landing, all the comings and goings, and he was said to be responsible for occasional poltergeist phenomena, the rattling of paperweights, flying ledgers, and sounds like the brisk opening of folios, the banging of fists on a table, and so on—evidenced by successive night watchman. This could be easily understood, for the ghost of the Registrar had many reasons to feel sad and frustrated. All the principles of co-operation for which he had sacrificed his life were dissolving under his eyes, if he could look beyond the portals of the bank itself, right across the little stretch of lawn under the banyan tree, in whose shade Margayya sat and transacted his business. There was always a semi-circle of peasants sitting round him....He was to them a wizard who enabled them to draw unlimited loans from the co-operative bank. If the purpose of the co-operative movement was the promotion of thrift and the elimination of middlemen, those two were just the objects that were defeated here under the banyan tree. Margayya didn't believe in advocating thrift: his living depended upon helping people to take loans from the bank opposite and from each other. (pp.1-2)

Here, then, the author specifies that 'setting' and local history are relevant to our understanding of character. The contradictions of Indian life are unmistakably epitomised in the situation of Margayya thriving under the banyan tree at the expense of the modern bank across the lawn. Because of the suggestion that Margayya and his profession belong to 'time immemorial', the bank by comparison seems little more than a

passing quirk of history. Moreover, in view of the worthy intentions of the bank's founder, it is ironical that Margayya is regarded as something of a philanthropist by his credulous clients. But western systems of efficient administration were designed for a pattern of life and psychology quite different from India's, and it is not so surprising therefore that the attempt to impose a foreign financial system upon Malgudi is frustrated by the Indian's preference for a time-honoured, indigenous though iniquitous system of money-lending.

While villagers such as those under the banyan and others bringing produce in bullock carts quite regularly come into Malgudi from outlying districts, they only help provide a realistic background or the occasional minor role. Examples of the latter are the blacksmith and his wife who befriend Savitri in The Dark Room, and Muthu, the Mempi village shopkeeper in the Man-eater. Such people are generally typed by their deferential attitudes towards the urbanites who constitute the vast majority of Narayan's characters. Ved Mehta reports:

> Narayan has no illusions about noble rustics. As far as he is concerned, their lives are monotonous and sedentary, and there is no story waiting in a village —the birthplace of a good novel being a halfway house between a static village and an anonymous industrial city.[36]

36 "A Train Had Just Arrived at Malgudi Station", p.52.

Narayan told Hans Beerman:

I feel that the novel is urban. Social life only develops in sophisticated societies. It has thus come from the West.[37]

This attitude is reflected in the following description of Margayya and Market Road:

They reached 10 Market Road, and at once Margayya was enchanted....The Malgudi gutter ran below his shop with a mild rumble, and not so mild smell. But Margayya either did not notice or did not mind it, being used to it in his own home. Margayya's blood was completely the city man's and revelled in crowds, noise and bustle; the moment he looked out and saw the stream of people and traffic flowing up and down the road, he felt that he was in the right place. A poet would perhaps have felt exasperated by the continuous din, but to Margayya it was like a background music to his own thoughts. There was a row of offices and shops opposite, insurance agencies, local representatives of newspapers, hair-cutting saloons, some film distributors, a lawyer's chamber, and a hardware shop, into which hundreds of people were going every day. Margayya calculated that if he could at least filter twenty out of that number for his own purposes, he would be more than well off. (p.110)

Not an impersonal metropolis like Madras (where Chandran feels lost), Malgudi is small enough for its characters to remain eccentric, distinctive and large as life.

Collectively, R.K. Narayan's novels and stories provide a social history of Malgudi. The mild extent

37 "Two Indian Interviews", p.293.

to which Malgudi feels the reverberations of the Independence movement in the early Thirties is incidentally woven into the texture of his first novel, Swami and Friends. There are strikes and a mass meeting. Swami and others wear Gandhi caps and burn English cloth; and they deflect their dislike of school into nationalistic enthusiasm by breaking school windows. A central thematic idea in Waiting for the Mahatma is that Gandhi's creed of non-violence, as opposed to revolutionary terrorism, was valuable in imparting self-discipline and ethical maturity to young nationalists. In this novel Gandhi shuns sycophants and reminds Malgudians of the injustices suffered by the untouchables in their town, while the author satirically exposes the fainthearted hypocrites in the Congress ranks.

Quite a few of Narayan's stories and sketches describe Malgudi during the transition from British rule to self-government, and gently satirise some of the civic and administrative follies that result from absurdly excessive patriotism. His attacks on hypocrisy, confusion, corruption, inefficiency, indolence, ambition and self-seeking in public life are often amusingly devastating. A healthy disrespect for bureaucracy is summed up in the statement: 'The vandal in authority is the person to be most dreaded today'.[38] The essay "Street

38 "The Vandal", Next Sunday (Sketches and Essays), Bombay, Pearl Publications, 1960, p.38.

Names" is a good-natured remonstration against newly Independent India's 'passion for changing names of streets, towns, parks and squares'.[39] Argument is reinforced by whimsical common-sense:

> There must not be too much rationale in the naming of a street. This is just where members of municipal bodies and perfervid patriots go wrong... confounding a familiar used landmark...the despot's name should be left untouched just to show how his despotism has proved futile in the long run. Acrimony, contemporaneously or in retrospect, can have no place in a nation nurtured on Ahimsa. (pp.187-8)

The short story "Lawley Road" is a very funny send-up of national self-consciousness and historical righteous indignation. The Talkative Man, recalling his career as a journalist, relates how he once bought the statue of Sir Frederick Lawley. That was in the early days of Independence when the nationalist-minded Malgudi councillors were making the 'town...unrecognisable with new names'.[40] Having changed 'Lawley Extension' to 'Gandhi Nagar', the 'Council unanimously resolved to remove' the Lawley statue:

> The Council with the Chairman sallied forth triumphantly next morning and circumambulated the statue. They now realized their mistake....In their imagination they had

39 Next Sunday, p.185.
40 Lawley Road, p.8.

thought that a vigorous resolution would be enough to topple down the statue of this satrap, but now they found that it stood with the firmness of a mountain ....But...If it was going to mean blasting up that part of the town for the purpose, they would do it. For they unearthed a lot of history about Sir Frederick Lawley. He was a combination of Attila, the scourge of Europe, and Nadir Shah, with the craftiness of a Machiavelli. (p.9)

And so the Talkative Man acquired the statue, believing he could make a vast profit selling it to the British Museum or Westminster Abbey. Lodged in his house, the statue stretched from the front hall into the street. It was not long, however, before the Council was embarrassed to discover that the Frederick Lawley whom the statue commemorated was not in fact the homicidal tyrant of Warren Hastings' time, but an enlightened progressive Governor who 'almost built' Malgudi, died trying to save the lives of villagers, and advocated Britain's withdrawal from India. In consequence, the Council Chairman privately bought back the statue, thereby assuring his re-election and redeeming a patriotic blunder with a national monument. Kabir Street was changed to Lawley Road.

Narayan's recent work, however, shows how Malgudi has changed with the times, having settled into the contemporary pattern of nationalistic feeling which (Narayan implies) is more self-critical though not necessarily free from absurdities. With the waning of British influence, there has been a tendency to regard America as the new source of westernisation. Dr. Joshi

(in the Man-eater) did his professional training in the United States and became head of Malgudi's virtually non-existent Department of Animal Welfare (in association with World Quadruped Relief League, Calif.) Mali (in The Sweet-Vendor) is more fashionable for being America-returned than England-returned. His attempt to establish a communications business selling American fiction-writing machines is Narayan's way of implying a comment about the automated society and the technocratic way of life.

Clearly, then, there is much to be learnt from Malgudi, not only about Indian life but also about people and their responses to the changes taking place in contemporary society. Narayan's work illustrates one of the exciting paradoxes of literature: that remoteness or unfamiliarity of setting, when authentically and credibly rendered, helps to give a story universal appeal. At his best, he reveals in the human heart and mind the already familiar as if we were seeing it for the first time. This is achieved mainly in comic terms but also with an understanding of the serious issues of life. In these respects the Indian experience and Hindu values contribute greatly to this understanding, just as the farcical often puts the serious in perspective. Thus the varieties of comic action in Narayan's work do not exist in an entertainment vacuum, but relate to such significant human themes and motifs as the place

of woman in society, the disruptive influences of the femme fatale, the moral limitations of a materialistic way of life, the consequences of flouting accepted codes, the complexities of human involvements, and the psychology and morality of such generally relevant Hindu concepts as 'detachment' and 'renunciation'.

2 NON-FICTION, STORIES AND EARLY NOVELS

The range and volume of R.K. Narayan's work outside the novels indicate how constantly active a writer he is. His non- and semi-fictional books so far are Next Sunday (1956), a collection of essays and sketches originally contributed to newspapers; My Dateless Diary (1960), an account of a visit to America; and Gods, Demons, and Others (1965), in which Narayan re-tells some mythic and legendary stories based on episodes in the Ramayana, Mahabharata and other classics. An Astrologer's Day (1947) and Lawley Road (1956) provide a representative sample of the large number of stories which were first-written mainly for the Madras Hindu. Some early collections of these stories are quite unprocurable.[41] But as Perry D. Westbrook points out, the extent and continuity of Narayan's creative newspaper writing shows that he 'is an Indian writing for Indians who happen to read English' and that 'long before he was a novelist with an enthusiastic

41 Cyclone and Other Stories, Mysore, Indian Thought Publications, n.d. Dodu and Other Stories, Mysore, Indian Thought Publications, n.d. Malgudi Days (Short Stories), Mysore, Indian Thought Publications, 1943.

Western following', he was an Indian journalist loved by his fellow-country-men.'[42] This writing ranges from reportorial vignettes or comments about life to carefully plotted entertainments and little ironic dramas. Westbrook is right in maintaining that the 'most impressive' stories in An Astrologer's Day 'are those that open a window on to the bleak, tedious lives of the white collar workers of India, that large segment of the population who drag out their lives at forty or fifty rupees a month in government or business employment' (p.43).

Next Sunday reveals Narayan's personality as a humorist[43] in the essayistic mode. His subjects are wide-ranging: bureaucracy and red tape, education, the arts, leisure, the boredom of conversation, arranged marriage, parenthood, humour, wit, and various forms of human imperfection. Thus, for example, "The Radio Licence" describes the extraordinary complications and mental hazards involved in filling in an official form; "Frog in the Well" comments on the difficulty of leading an isolated life when 'Society presses upon one all the time' (p.4); "Bridegroom Bargains" makes the point that, despite the fact that marriages are made in Heaven, marriage in India is a 'business' and therefore should

42 "The Short Stories of R.K. Narayan", The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, July 1968 no.5, p.41.

43 'that most dangerous of reputations to acquire', Next Sunday, p.63.

be run 'on efficient lines' (p.8). Narayan's astonishment that so many days of the year celebrate religious, national or improving causes is sublimated in his mock-serious suggestion that, as too much 'striving for knowledge...is unwholesome', there should be 'a world-wide celebration of a less knowledge day to be followed by another day for the promotion of healthy ignorance' (p.101). In similar vein, he advocates that someone should sponsor a world ugliness contest as a relief from the tedium of beauty quests. In fact, the Narayan of Next Sunday can be summed up as a commentator-reporter of the contemporary scene who makes many of his points ironically and in outrageously good taste.

The subject-matter of An Astrologer's Day and Lawley Road includes animals, children, the supernatural, sickness, suicide, the artist and society, the effects of the cinema on private lives, and a variety of contemporary realities. In the last category, for instance, are "Forty-five a Month", from An Astrologer's Day, and "The Martyr's Curse" and "Another Community", both from Lawley Road. "Forty-five a Month" shows how the life of an average clerk amounts to perpetual incarceration of soul and body. Venkat Rao is so frustrated by the conditions of his employment, and the materialistic necessities which rule his existence, that he reaches the threshold of rebellion only to find that he is so thoroughly snared in the system that escape is unthinkable. When forced to work back on the night

that he is at last determined to take his daughter to the cinema, Venkat Rao writes a passionate indictment of the management by way of resignation. As he is about to hand over his letter, however, the manager tells him he has been granted a five-rupee increment. He meekly does the overtime and returns home late to find his daughter asleep, still wearing the frock she was to go out in. The child's crushed dress epitomises the remorseless social power which forces Venkat Rao to hurt those he most wants to please. The point is reinforced in the consummate irony of the final sentence:

"I don't know if it is going to be possible for me to take her out at all—you see they are giving me an increment—" he wailed. (p.147)

The increment he so badly needs makes his imprisonment complete.

"Another Community" is a psychological portrait which shows how, during Partition, fear and suspicion bred neurotic anxiety and culminated in violent death. The message, like the theme, is to be found in countless stories by different writers:

"...There is no such thing as your community or mine. We are all of this country. Let us not cut each other's throats....we must not, we must not. We must not...." (Lawley Road, p.155)

"The Martyr's Curse" is also a story involving mob violence, though edged with pain of a more subtle and ironic kind. Rama is a hard-working sweet-vendor who makes a modestly prosperous living because his stall is strategically located in Market Road. Cinema crowds flock to him.

> No one was hurt by his activity and money-making, and not many people could be said to have died of taking his stuff, there were no more casualties through his catering than, say, through the indifferent municipal administration.
>
> But such security is unattainable in human life. The gods grow jealous of too much contentment anywhere and they show their displeasure all of a sudden. (pp.23-4)

Thus a riot breaks out and a political leader is shot on the very spot where Rama always sets up his stall. Afterwards this spot is consecrated as holy ground and a memorial to the martyr is erected there. As a result Rama is put out of business and becomes a waiter earning twenty rupees a month. 'Such is life' is the attitude Narayan seems to imply, backed up by the shoulder-shrugged insinuation that Rama's misfortune was caused by the gods. To speculate on how seriously Narayan intends the insinuation, even allowing for the tongue-in-cheek context in which it is made, is somewhat idle. There are times when he reserves for himself the privilege of enigma—and rightly so.

On the other hand, Narayan's stories and non-fiction do throw some light on his conception of his authorial role. A recurring raconteur and a story about a story-teller provide useful examples and also indicate the Indian style in this role. The raconteur is the 'Talkative Man'—he crops up on a number of occasions—and the story is "Under the Banyan Tree". They illustrate two aspects of the oral tradition from which Narayan draws inspiration: the contemporary city man who delights in recounting his experiences to those curious crowds which are every-ready to materialise (at least in Indian novels); and the hereditary professional who, in a graphic and entertaining style, hands down the ancient epics to generations of villagers.

Volubility is a characteristic of that type of Narayan character which the Talkative Man exemplifies: even if he were under a vow of silence, or like Raju in The Guide sought uninterrupted well-fed solitude, he would feel compelled to relate his personal history. Thus the Talkative Man tales are narrated in the first person (as is most of The Guide), a use of point of view which is consistent with Narayan's obvious belief that most people have interesting stories to tell about themselves, and that Indian society provides many favourable conditions both for experiences worth relating and the communal opportunity to do so. It is

quite significant that the astrologer (of "An Astrologer's Day") and Margayya both depend on their talents as reconteurs to help make their business dealings successful.

A characteristic of Narayan's use of the first-person point of view is that the narrator has a tale of misfortunes to relate (in retrospect vicariously) from which Narayan preserves a dispassionate or ironic detachment. Thus, in "A Night of Cyclone", the Talkative Man tells of his experiences one cyclonic night (at this time he was a supervisor of construction threatened with destruction). Everything goes wrong: his pregnant wife starts labour two months prematurely, the end of the world has been forecast for that very night, he cannot get the fire started, there is nothing for his dinner and he is bitten by a scorpion while scrounging for food, the house threatens to collapse at any moment; when he sets out in the storm to find someone to deliver the baby, his lamp extinguished, he loses his umbrella, stumbles into cactus plants, and is wet to the skin—only to discover the doctor has gone to Bombay. On his return home, the kitchen is flattened by the wind above which can be heard only his wife's cries. Then, suddenly, 'the loud, lusty cry of a newborn baby pierced the stormy darkness' (Lawley Road, p.32).

Life prevails after all.

While it is clear that the Talkative Man amuses his creator, equally Narayan himself is very much of a talkative man on paper. On the other hand, Narayan also has affiliations with the classical literary tradition which are not evident in the Talkative Man stories, apart from the supernatural aspects of some of them. "Under the Banyan Tree" shows how the traditional story-teller, like Narayan, conceives his vocational vision of life in religious terms. In the story this provides Nambi with the strength to accept the sadness of his fate in forgetting his repertoire, and also to make out of this misfortune his last and best story, the most original and yet most divinely inspired. It is simply this:

"It is the Mother who gives the gifts; and it is She who takes away the gifts. Nambi is a dotard. He speaks when the Mother has anything to say. He is struck dumb when She has nothing to say. But what is the use of the jasmine when it has lost its scent? What is the lamp for when all the oil is gone? Goddess be thanked....These are my last words on this earth; and this is my greatest story." (An Astrologer's Day, p.228)

Appropriately, "Under the Banyan Tree" has a clearly implied moral: that Nambi's life has not ended in waste, for the decline of his powers and the culmination

of his stories involve acceptance of self and an ultimate degree of wisdom. Hence: 'The rest of his life...was one great consummate silence' (p.229). Consummate is the key word.

In some ways, Narayan can be regarded as a disciple of the traditional story-teller. Applicable to himself are the following comments he made in 1953:

> All imaginative writing in India has had its origin in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata....An author would pick up an incident or a character out of one or the other and create a new work with it...[44]

Similarly relevant is Narayan's description of the village story-teller, or Pandit, in Gods, Demons, and Others:

> He has no doubt whatever that the Vedas were created out of the breath of God, and contain within them all that a man needs for his salvation at every level....
>
> ...Every story has in it a philosophical or moral significance, and an understanding of the distinction between good and evil....Everything is bound to come out right in the end; if not immediately at least in a thousand or ten thousand years; if not in this world, at least in other worlds.
>
> ...The strong man of evil continues to be reckless until he is destroyed by the tempo of his own misdeeds.

44 "The Fiction Writer in India His Tradition and His Problems", The Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 192 No. 4 (Oct.1953), p.119.

> Evil has in it, buried subtly, the infallible seeds of its own destruction. And however frightening a demon might seem, his doom is implied in his own evil propensities—a profoundly happy and sustaining philosophy which unfailingly appeals to our people...[45]

While granting that Narayan's stories avoid the traditional 'didactic interludes'[46] and are written, as he says, 'out of the impact of life and persons around me',[47] it is not difficult to show how Narayan belongs to the ancient tradition in that he makes serious as well as comic use of it. Two examples will serve as illustration: "Half-a-Rupee Worth" from Lawley Road and The Man-eater of Malgudi. "Half-a-Rupee Worth" is a story with a clearly contrived 'moral significance'—that a person with an all-consuming greed can himself be consumed by it. Subbiah is a wealthy rice merchant who illegally hoards grain in order to make colossal profits when shortage causes inflated prices. By making out that rice is virtually unprocurable he forces the starving poor to pay exorbitant prices. His demise is ironically appropriate therefore; a pile of falling rice bags crushes him to death while he is fetching from his secret supply half-a-rupee worth of rice for a

45 Heinemann, 1965, pp.4-5.
46 ibid., p.9.
47 ibid., p.10.

desperate customer. Thus 'Evil has in it, buried subtly, the infallible seeds of its own destruction'.

In The Man-eater of Malgudi, the characterisation and fate of Vasu are worked out in terms of a classical model: the rakshasa of the epics to which Narayan refers in his introduction to Gods, Demons and Others, where he points out that the rakshasas (or demons) 'undertake intense penance, acquire strange and unlimited powers and harass mankind and godkind alike until a redeemer appears and puts them out' (p.8). Vasu's penance consists of a vow of self-control to ensure that his enormous physical strength is not used indiscriminately; he will not kill other men unless they hit first. His 'strange, unlimited powers' include, besides this strength he developed as a circus strong man, his diabolically accurate marksmanship as a hunter, and his taxidermist ability to give the dead the illusion of life. In exercising the power of death over life, Vasu is unmistakably in the true demonic tradition.

Vasu harasses mankind in a number of ways. He takes over part of Nataraj's establishment uninvited, and insults the printer's friends; he kidnaps Nataraj whenever he feels inclined, drives at demonic speeds, malevolently aiming his jeep at pedestrians, and misappropriates moneys donated for the public celebration of the poet's monosyllabic epic. He intends to use

the procession associated with the celebration as an opportunity to frighten the Mempi temple elephant into a destructive rampage, thereby entitling him to shoot the elephant (the stuffing of this animal is to be the artistic climax of his taxidermal career). And he nonchalantly breaks the wrist of a police inspector who attempts to impound his guns.

Vasu makes external life difficult for 'godkind' through the direct insult to Ganesha (the elephant god) and because of his wanton premeditated abuse of the sanctity of life principle. What mortal profession could be a greater insult to the gods than taxidermy? It is no wonder that an orthodox Hindu like Nataraj is horrified by Vasu's sacrilege in defiling the printer's 'precincts' and, in particular, by his killing and stuffing a garunda eagle, which is "the messenger of God Vishnu" (p.53).

Nataraj's assistant, Sastri, is the one person who comprehends the phenomenon of Vasu with utter clarity. His comprehension of Vasu is not impaired by human weakness, whereas Nataraj not only derives a perverted pleasure from having such a formidable enemy but also confesses to a sneaking admiration for Vasu's promiscuous appetite and strenth of purpose; and the journalist also, in his timorous hatred of Vasu, becomes too ego-involved to take a balanced view. Sastri, however, is imbued with the Indian virtue of detachment; he has no dealings with the man-eater

and is secure in the knowledge that the demon will bring about his own destruction:

> "He [Vasu] shows all the definitions of a rakshasa," persisted Sastri, and went on to define the make-up of a rakshasa, or a demoniac creature who possessed enormous strength, strange powers, and genius, but recognized no sort of restraints of man or God. He said, "Every rakshasa gets swollen with his ego. He thinks he is invincible, beyond every law. But sooner or later something or other will destroy him." He stood expatiating on the lives of various demons in puranas [Ravana, Mahisha, Bhasmasura, Daksha] to prove his point. (p.75)

Later, Nataraj (p.89) and his wife (p.177) also refer to Vasu as a rakshasa.

With a nice combination of parody and earnestness, Narayan continues Vasu's destruction in conformity with the mythic archetype. Vasu unwittingly turns his demonic strength upon himself; in the act of killing two mosquitoes on his forehead, he kills himself. Thus things come out right in the end and the 'strong man of evil...is destroyed by the tempo of his own misdeeds'. It is ironic that a small insignificant variety of insect should be the cause of his death. In keeping with the didactic convention of the traditional story, Sastri sums up the moral value of the Man-eater:

> "...he had to conserve all that might for his own destruction. Every demon appears in the world with a special boon of indestructibility. Yet the

universe has survived all the rakshasas that were ever born. Every demon carries within him, unknown to himself, a tiny seed of self-destruction, and goes up in thin air at the most unexpected moment. Otherwise what is to happen to humanity?" (pp.182-3)

A different kind of amusing parody is provided by the opening of The Sweet-Vendor:

"CONQUER TASTE, and you will have conquered the self," said Jagan to his listener, who asked "Why conquer the self?" Jagan said, "I do not know, but all our sages advise us so."

Apart from the incongruity of Jagan's advice, in view of his occupation as a sweet-vendor, this opening is humorously reminiscent of the ancient tale which, as Narayan points out in Gods, Demons, and Others, 'invariably starts off when an inquiring mind asks of an enlightened one a fundamental question' (p.7).

While Narayan may thus depict a character in terms of classical example, he also uses some of the people in his earlier work, short stories included, as models for later characterisations. From this point of view Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937) and The English Teacher (1945) comprise something of a trilogy in which three different central characters—Swami, Chandran and Krishnan—represent the growth of a common personality at different stages of his life. Certainly Swami took Narayan's fancy to the extent that he figures in short

stories as well as in Narayan's first novel. Thus, in "Father's Help", as in the novel, Swami is seen in characteristic poses—feigning illness and soliciting his mother's sympathy to avoid school, and unsuccessfully playing his father off against a teacher. In "A Hero" Swami is the centre of a typical adventure—he accidentally captures a burglar—and we see something of the affectionate relationship with his Granny which contributes noticeably to the domestic realism of Swami and Friends.

Of Narayan's essays in Next Sunday "On Humour" probably has most relevance to his fiction. It is clear from this essay that he does not relish academic dissection of humour, and the critic of his work should no doubt take heed accordingly. But the concluding statement does emphasise that one of the main functions of humour is to draw attention to 'the absurdities and contradictions seen in public life' (p.53); as we have seen, Narayan's work contains many delightful examples. His humour is however in the tradition of humane curiosity, not misanthropic satire. This is borne out by the following comments in the essay "The Talkers' Club":

> The most interesting subject in life is man. But alas, we have developed a highly artificial style of

social life, whereby it is a mark of civilised existence to remain strictly neutral and impersonal in one's talk. This is the main source of present-day dullness. How can there be any activity in life unless we comment on and describe personal matters, ours as well as other people's? (pp.136-7)

Man as mischievous schoolboy and romantic undergraduate provide the main interest respectively in Swami and Friends and The Bachelor of Arts. In the former work Narayan provides a comic slant on life by tellingly exploiting the viewpoint of the child and the discrepancy between the child's notion of reality and the adult's. He finds the child a natural medium for humour both because the child has an innate sense of fun and capacity for joy, and because the child is often unconsciously funny, particularly when it is being most serious or adopts grossly exaggerated attitudes. Shared laughter in fact provides the basis of Swami's friendship with Samuel ('known as the 'Pea' on account of his size'):

There was nothing outstanding about him...no outstanding virtue of muscle or intellect. He was as bad in Arithmetic as Swaminathan was....The bond between them was laughter. They were able to see together the same absurdities and incongruities in things. The most trivial and unnoticeable thing to others would tickle them to death. (p.9)

Certainly there is evidence of this: for example, the occasion when Swami's intoxicated imitation of his

new-born baby-brother causes Samuel to laugh uncontrollably. However, on most occasions when Swami focuses on an absurdity or incongruity his mood is one of dedicated seriousness. Accordingly, the comedy is double-edged and the reader is disposed to laugh simultaneously both at the given absurdity and the boy's mock-heroic stance. The opening chapter provides a characteristic example in the conflict between Swami and Ebenezar, the fanatical Scripture teacher at the Albert Mission School. The incident begins as a skit on the passionate intolerance with which the obsessed Christian tackles the job of conversion.

"Oh, wretched idiots!" the teacher said, clenching his fists, "Why do you worship dirty, lifeless, wooden idols and stone images? Can they talk? No. Can they see? No. Can they bless you? No. Can they take you to Heaven? No. Why? Because they have no life...."

..."Now see our Lord Jesus. He could cure the sick, relieve the poor, and take us to Heaven. He was a real God...." Tears rolled down Ebenezar's cheeks when he pictured Jesus before him. Next moment his face became purple with rage as he thought of Sri Krishna: "Did our Jesus go about with dancing girls like your Krishna? Did our Jesus go about stealing butter...?"

...Swaminathan's blood boiled. He got up and asked, "If he did not, why was he crucified?" ... "If he was a God, why did he eat flesh and fish and drink wine?" As a brahmin boy it was inconceivable to him that a God should be a non-vegetarian. In answer to this, Ebenezar left his seat, advanced slowly towards Swaminathan, and tried to wrench his left ear off. (pp.5-6)

This incident is based on Narayan's own boyhood experience,[48] and the satire is accordingly reinforced by a personal conviction that the religious attempt by the West to convert Hindus to Christianity was absurd and presumptuous. What counts, however, is not so much exactitude as Narayan's comic elaboration of the remembered incident. Thus the letter of protest Swami's father writes to the Head Master is an incongruous pastiche of nationalistic indignation and Anglophile formality of style.

Ebenezar's fanaticism is taken to the point of the absurd and then delightfully deflated. 'In Ebenezar's hand' the Baghavad Gita 'served as a weapon against Hinduism' (p.10). The Head Master's appearance in the classroom, however, deflects him from his rhetorical demolition to the hastily opened Bible and the description of the Nativity:

> The great event had occurred. There the divine occupant was in the manger. The Wise Men of the East were faithfully following the Star....
>
> The Head Master listened for a while and, in an undertone, demanded an explanation. They were nearing the terminal examination and Ebenezar had still not gone beyond the Nativity. When would he reach the Crucifixion and Resurrection, and begin to revise? Ebenezar was flabbergasted. He could not think of anything to say. He made a bare escape by hinting that that particular day of the week, he usually devoted to a rambling revision. Oh, no! He was not as far behind as that. He was in the proximity of the Last Supper. (p.11)

48 See Ved Mehta, "A Train Had Just Arrived at Malgudi Station", p.54.

In this manner the weighty theme of the meeting of two incompatible religions is effectively and comically put into meaningful perspective.

Narayan's indirect plea for cultural integrity, however, is not issued in contradiction to the realities of human nature. He reveals the self-interested side of human motivation, no matter how exalted or sublime or ethical the motive concerned is said to be. Thus in matters of religion, for instance, Narayan never forgets the elements of human psychology involved in man's attitude to the Hindu pantheon. Consider the occasion when Swami, desperate for money to buy a hoop, approaches the deities for help. Even allowing for childish naivete, how true to life it is that Swami's deeply ingrained respect for the power and reality of the Gods is matched by his impurity and pettiness of motive and angry disappointment. He very conscientiously adheres to the ritual of <u>pooja</u>. With 'great piety' he explains his situation to the Gods—'how he expected them to convert the two pebbles into two three-pie coins, and why he needed money so urgently'. In return he generously 'promised that if the Gods helped him, he would give up biting his thumb' (p.70). But, after allowing the Gods a respectable interval in which to perform the miracle, he finds the pebbles are still pebbles. Note, though, that Swami does not regard the Gods'

failure as in any way proof of their non-existence; on the contrary, he is convinced that they are deliberately frustrating him. However, his fear of their tendency to wrath soon displaces and suppresses his anger at their 'indifference' to him:

> The indifference of the Gods infuriated him and brought tears to his eyes. He wanted to abuse the Gods, but was afraid to. Instead, he vented all his rage on the cardboard box, and kicked it from place to place....He paused and doubted if the Gods would approve of even this....He might get on without money, but it was dangerous to incur the wrath of Gods; they might make him fail in his examinations, or kill father, mother, granny, or the baby. (p.71)

The above scene indicates how naturally Swami is part of his environment—a world of Gods, school, home and cricket. Literature has always been concerned with seeing how the individual contends with his environment, and Narayan in Swami and Friends shows that experiencing this through the child's eyes can provide the adult with a new appreciation of the relativity of human problems and difficulties. Also, the contrast between child and adult points of view indicates that comedy is an essential ingredient of life. Thus, for Swami and friends, forming a cricket team is not only the most important occupation in life but also reveals that the world is a place full of endless troubles; while Swami's discussion with

his Granny about cricket is an entertaining example of the way in which Narayan contrasts adult and child viewpoints on the basis of comic irony.

Here is the part of the latter scene which is most relevant. It begins with Swami astonished that his Granny has no comprehension of his new title as the Tate of his cricket team:

"What is Tate?" she asked innocently. Swaminathan's disappointment was twofold: she had not known anything of his new title, and failed to understand its rich significance even when told. At other times he would have shouted at her. But now he was a fresh penitent, and so asked her kindly, "Do you mean to say that you don't know Tate?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Tate, the great cricket player, the greatest bowler on earth. I hope you know what cricket is."

"What is that?" granny asked. Swaminathan was aghast at this piece of illiteracy. "Do you mean to say, granny, that you don't know what cricket is, or are you fooling me?"

"I dont't know what you mean."

"Don't keep on saying 'I don't know what you mean'. I wonder what the boys and men of your days did in the evenings! I think they spent all the twenty-four hours in doing holy things."

He considered for a second. Here was his granny stagnating in appalling ignorance; and he felt it his duty to save her. He delivered a short speech setting forth the principles, ideals, and the philosophy of the game of cricket, mentioning the radiant gods of that world. He asked her every few seconds if she understood, and she nodded her head, though she caught only three per cent of what he said. He concluded the speech with a sketch of the history and the prospects of the M.C.C. [Malgudi Cricket Club (And Victory Union Eleven)]...." (pp.127-8)

This scene, then, is based on an actual social phenomenon, namely the younger generation's abhorrence of the superstitious ignorance of their elders. However, the perspective is altogether comic because the subject is merely schoolboy cricket (not sociologically exalted topics like caste, religion, poverty, economic injustice, female emancipation etc.) and because a young boy posing as an important experienced man of the world is inherently amusing. Moreover, the situation also includes a comically ironic reversal of roles, with Swami administering admonitions and lectures (in a parody of paternal authority) and Granny reduced to the status of a child, innocent in the matter of life and ignorant of the hard realities of the world. Furthermore, the scene is appropriately rounded off when Father appears and eclipses Swami, whose bravado suddenly gives way to writhing awkwardness.

Most of the scenes in Swami and Friends are open to this kind of analysis and thus demonstrate Narayan's fundamental fidelity to life. In portraying Swami's friendships and fights with Somu, Mani, Sankar, Samuel and Rajam, Swami's expulsion from school and subsequent brief disappearance, schoolboy pranks and childish innocence, the child's critical yet timid attitude to authority, the strength of family ties, and so on, the author carefully selects his material from the real world. Social attitudes and cultural beliefs

may be treated disrespectfully or exaggerated to the point of absurdity, but the consequential comedy remains relevant in being enjoyable for its own sake and in manifesting a compassionate awareness of the world of childhood. It is a world warm-blooded with natural responses to life in which Evil is somehow absent (along with Perfect Good), and Mischief happily reigns in consort with Innocence. A state of grace prevails in a real setting where human perfection would seem boring and intolerable.

Swami and Friends is an unpretentiously modest achievement which will remain readable mainly because of its author's lively love of life, his reliable insights, and his accuracy of comic aim. It is a rather slight work but does have real savour. The same is probably true of Narayan's second novel, The Bachelor of Arts, though here the central characterisation is rounder, partly because young adults are less straightforward than young children and partly because Narayan's power of character portrayal was maturing at the time.

Chandran, the central character in The Bachelor of Arts, is as subject to deflating experiences as Swami, but a higher proportion of these are more surely the work of life (as distinct from the contriving novelist) than was the case in Swami and Friends. The main theme of The Bachelor of Arts comprises that universal experience which Joseph Conrad has described

as the crossing of the shadowline between carefree youth and responsible manhood. Fortunately, though, there is nothing particularly Conradian, Joycean or Lawrencian about Chandran, and he remains from first to last Narayan's own creation as well as something of a symbol of Indian experience.

Part One of the novel portrays Chandran at College—in many respects as a facsimile university student. His hubris is of a familiar kind. For instance, he stares for half-an-hour at his name on the notice-board—seeing himself as the star attraction of a forthcoming debate—and after the debate he considers himself 'a remarkable orator'.[49] His belief in his independence and maturity of mind, however, is deflatingly juxtaposed against the deferential awe he shows towards his father; the young emancipated rebel still sneaks in the back way after a late film because of his father's disapproval. So far as studies are concerned, dedicated worrying and the drawing up of pious unrealistic programmes of revision are industrious substitutes for work itself. Chandran's attitude to the British principal of the College is conventionally political, and with some justification as Narayan's satirical sketch of Brown suggests.

49 Swami and Friends. The Bachelor of Arts, East Lansing, the Michigan State College Press, 1954. The Bachelor of Arts, p.11. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

Other members of the staff are also crisply caricatured. For example Gajapthi, the Assistant Professor of English:

> a frail man with a meagre moustache and heavy spectacles. He earned the hatred of the students by his teaching and of his colleagues by his conceit. He said everywhere that not ten persons in the world had understood Shakespeare; he asserted that there were serious errors even in Fowler's Modern English Usage; he corrected everybody's English; he said that no Indian could ever write English; this statement hurt all his colleagues.... When he valued test or examination papers, he never gave anybody more than forty per cent...
>
> He entered the hall at a trot, jumped on the platform, opened his book, and began to read a scene in Othello. He read Shakespeare in a sing-song fashion, and with a vernacular twang. He stopped now and then to criticize other critics. Though Dowden had said so-and-so, Mr. Gajapthi was not prepared to be browbeaten by a big name. No doubt Bradley and others had done a certain amount of research in Shakespeare, but one couldn't accept all that they said as gospel truth. (p.24)

The history professor suffers a similar satirical fate. Among the exaggerated claims he makes for the importance of his discipline (and therefore of himself, and how true of many academics) is that 'what the country needed most urgently' was not 'Self-Government or Economic Independence, but a clarified, purified Indian History' (p.37).

Chandran's closest friends are as typically undergraduate as himself. There is Natesan, perpetual

organiser and secretary of student organisations; Veeraswami, the revolutionary who was responsible for 'the most violent paper ever read before an association' (p.45); and the aspiring poet Mohan, whose 'obscure statements' 'fascinated' Chandran (p.49). Veeraswami is the intellectual extrovert:

> Chandran had a feeling that he had got into bed with a porcupine. Veeraswami bristled with prejudices and violence. Imperialism was his favourite demon. He believed in smuggling arms into the country, and, on a given day, shooting all the Englishmen, he assured Chandran that he was even then preparing for that great work. His education, sleep, contacts, and everything, were a preparation. (p.46).

Mohan is the sensitive soul who has written poems 'on a wide variety of subjects—from a Roadside Grass-seller to the Planet in Its Orbit; from Lines suggested by an Ant to the Dying Musician. All conceivable things seem to have incited Mohan to anger, gloom, despair, and defiance' (p.49). (Narayan knows that there have always been Angry Young Men.) Representing the eccentricity of the impassioned temperament, Veeraswami and Mohan belong in Narayan's gallery of favourite types and have counterparts in the journalist and poet of The Man-eater of Malgudi.

Part Two of The Bachelor of Arts portrays Chandran, during his early post-College days, hopelessly and idealistically in love. With time on his hands as an

unemployed graduate, and his father offering him the chance to study at an English university—that is, confronted with the reality of the educated poor and the opportunity of the relatively affluent—Chandran reads, smokes and talks with friends, goes to the movies, and promenades regularly along the banks of the Sarayu. While relatives envisage careers for him—an 'uncle seemed to live in an endless dream of introductory letters' (p.52)—Chandran has the time to be young and fanciful. The inevitable happens: first love, with the emotional intensity and love-at-first-sight trauma which, it appears, has only been felt before with comparable profundity in the Ramayana world of ancient heroic lovers. He sees a fifteen or sixteen year-old girl on the Sarayu sands, and is stunned: imagination, not a meeting or personal contact, supply him with the knowledge of her compatible perfection. And with such knowledge come all the heart-ripping potential barriers of tragic separation, against which only his noble enlightened modernity can prevail. And so Chandran romantically rationalises his problem, long before he has done anything to ascertain whether the delights of such a problem and its ideal solution are a realistic possibility. Later he manages to learn that his beloved's name is Malathi, but meanwhile the memory of first-sight passion already anticipates their marriage in a rapturous dream of social reform:

> Suppose, though unmarried, she belonged to some other caste? A marriage would not be tolerated even between sub-sects of the same caste. If India was to attain salvation these watertight divisions must go—Community, Caste, Sects, Sub-sects, and still further divisions. He felt very indignant. He would set an example himself by marrying this girl whatever her caste or sect might be. (p.56)

Once again Narayan's humour, resting authentically on real social conventions, saves him from banality. The custom of the arranged marriage and the codes concerning the social intercourse of young people of marriageable age (very young in the case of the girl) are incontrovertible realities in Chandran's time and place. Thus Chandran's romanticism is plausibly sentimental, being normal experience amusingly heightened. And so his days now have only one purpose: the walk by the Sarayu and the promise of seeing Malathi from a head-bowed guilty distance. 'Staring was half the victory in love' (p.60). 'This optical communion became a daily habit' (p.64). Merely to accompany Malathi home would realise his romantic ideal. Narayan finds this wish-fulfilment dream quite enchanting, commenting: 'It must be noted that in this dream the young companion did not exist' (p.65). The young companion is the little girl Malathi always brings with her. One way or another, it seems, Chandran has to be deflated by reality.

Eventually, of course, love at long distance without close contact becomes intolerable. Thus Chandran

goes down with romantic melancholy. Such is his parents' concern that they agree to find out if marriage between their son and Malathi is religiously and socially feasible. Chandran ecstatically learns that she is of the right caste. Narayan takes full advantage of the opportunity to introduce that stock Indian character—the match-maker. The result is sheer comedy of manners. The match-maker is called Ganapthi. Sastrigal. The suave diplomacy of his talk testifies to his professional adeptness, particularly in the following discussion with Chandran's mother who asks if there is anything wrong with Malathi's family; the match-maker replies:

> "Absolutely nothing," replied the old man. He now saw he ought not to be critical in his remarks.... "Absolutely nothing. Anyone that says such a thing will have a rotting tongue. The girl is only well-grown, and I don't think she is as old as she looks. She can't be more than fifteen. This has become the standard age for girls nowadays. Everybody holds advanced views in these days. Even in an ancient and orthodox family like Sadasiva Iyer's they married a girl recently at fifteen!"
>
> This was very comforting to Chandran's mother. She asked: "Do you think that it is a good family?"
>
> "D.W. Krishnan comes of a very noble family. His father was..." The [~~sic~~] Sastrigal went on giving an impressive history of the family, ranging over three generations. "If Krishnan is now only a Head Clerk it is because when he came into the property his elder brothers had squandered all of it and left only debts and encumbrances. Krishnan was rocked in a golden cradle when he was young, but became the foster-son of Misfortune after his father died. It is all fate. Who can foresee what is going to happen?" (p.75)

Narayan's penchant for refining extremist attitudes down to their inherent comicality is illustrated in the above conservativism of so-called 'advanced views'. Ganapthi's remarks about Krishnan's modest status are well calculated to meet in advance any objections to Krishnan which might be motivated by mercenary considerations. In emphasising that Krishnan was the victim of a family feud the matchmaker subliminally enlists the sympathy of Chandran's mother, because he knows from experience that most people regard themselves as victims of an unjust distribution of the family inheritance and are therefore disposed to sympathise with a fellow victim. Also, his metaphorical cliches and fatalistic philosophy are formally appropriate.

When it is learnt that the girl's horoscope is to be sent to be matched with Chandran's, the potential bridegroom is deliriously happy. In typical Narayan style, Chandran is shown transported by his imagination into the ego-coddling unrealities of Quixotic conjecture:

> They were probably goaded on by the girl. He had every reason to believe that the girl had told her parents she would marry Chandran and no one else. But how could she know him or his name? Girls had a knack of learning these things by a sort of sixth sense. How splendid of her to speak out her mind like this, brave girl. If her mind matched her form, it must be one of the grandest things in the world....

...He put down her absence at the river to her desire to save Chandran's reputation....Such a selfless creature. Would rather sacrifice her evening's outing than subject Chandran to gossip. Chandran had no doubt that she was going to be the most perfect wife a man could ever hope to get. (pp.78-9)

Meanwhile Narayan makes the most out of this comedy of conventions. A delay in the delivery of the horoscope was caused by a succession of inauspicious days. Chandran conducts himself in the correct orthodox manner for the sake of the parents. His mother expects a "reasonable" dowry. Now his major intellectual exercise consists of a tormenting attempt to recollect Malathi's features in sculptural detail. 'His latest hobby was scanning the faces of passers-by in the streets to see if anyone resembled her' (p.83). However, the drama of arranging the marriage according to old custom and antiquated etiquette comes to a catastrophic climax: the horoscopes do not match. Despite a consultation between each party and their respective astrologers, which turns into a fanatical controversy over the validity of the two respective almanac systems, the position of Mars in Chandran's horoscope, in alleged fatal conjunction with Malathi, ruins the possibility of marriage. Krishna Iyer is hubristically adamant:

"...I don't usually concern myself with the factors that indicate prosperity, wealth, progeny, and all that. I usually overlook them. But I do feel that we can't ignore the question of longevity. I know hundreds of cases where the presence of Mars in this house...I can tell you that..." He hesitated to say it. "It kills the wife soon after the marriage," he said, when pressed by Chandran's father. (p.88)

And so Part Two ends with Malathi's marriage to someone else, and the departure of the heart-broken disillusioned unrequited lover for Madras.

Before examining the next stage of Chandran's progress towards maturity it is worth observing how, in the horoscopic comedy of errors, Narayan blends farce with verisimilitude. Matters of formal procedure aside, the attempt to arrange the marriage is not quite as old-fashioned as the dramatic style indicates. The initiative originally came from Chandran, not his parents, and, despite their reservations, they accept his demand of matrimonial freedom of choice and do their best to oblige him. Thus, in reality, there was an attempt at a compromise between romantic love and the arranged marriage. The romantic irony of the situation lies not only in the incompatibility of the horoscopes, but also in Chandran himself. For, although he sees himself as a romantic individualist, he is far more conditioned by the old ways than he acknowledges; after all, he

never even gets to speak to the woman he wants to marry, and he is shy and naive emotionally. On the other hand, the dilemma of Chandran is not peculiar to India. His sexual innocence and lack of amatory confidence are universal phenomena. There is no ready-made remedy for the pangs and immaturity of first love. Moreover there are parents everywhere who like to feel they have approved or 'arranged' their children's marriages to some extent.

It is of course generally acknowledged that the experience of life in the wide wide world helps a young person to mature. But Chandran in Madras is very much an innocent abroad—and worse, an innocent who had no interest in life now that he is permanently deprived of his beloved. Were it not for the social stigma attaching to suicide (so he rationalises) our young Hamlet would take his life.

At the hotel where he is staying Chandran makes his first acquaintance with a man of the world, Kailas, who is full of 'aggressive hospitality' (p.97). Kailas is a great fornicator and drinker, and tries to take Chandran in hand by opening for him the door to the sensual pleasures. Narayan uses this situation to demonstrate that Chandran's character is fundamentally orthodox: Chandran will not take alcohol and is shocked both at the thought of offending his mother and of visiting a brothel. It is not a question of priggishness, however. With restrained sympathy, Narayan

portrays in Chandran an endearing combination of moral innocence and moral integrity. Similarly, the judgement passed on Kailas is humane: for the author clearly delights in the roisterer's personality.

In reacting virtuously against hedonism and sin, Chandran jumps with lamb-like spontaneity back into the fold of the Hindu tradition:

> Now what did it matter where he lived? He was like a sanyasi. Why "like"? He was a sanyasi; the simplest solution. Shave the head, dye the clothes in ochre, and you were dead for aught the world cared. (p.102)

The situation is basically ironic, for the callow youth becomes a holy man, not for spiritual reasons, but because of his erotic frustrations. Two side implications are characteristically Narayan: first, the incongruity between motive and devout appearance (cp. The Guide); and, second, the author's implicit respect for tradition, in this case because of the psychological and social practicalities of ascetic idealism which, as a way of life, can absorb various kinds of nomads, outcastes, truth-seekers and social deviants.

At the same time, Narayan points out with whimsical perspicacity that renunciation is valid, not as an escape from life, but as a means whereby the mature and experienced person may attain real peace. Since the novel defines a sanyasi as 'one who had renounced

the world and was untouched by its joys and sorrows' (p.107), the illegitimacy of Chandran's conversion is clearly evident in the agony of his sorrows and his regret for joys denied.

The villagers into whose midst Chandran wanders, in the guise of a sanyasi, accept him for what he appears to be, but he finds it embarrassingly difficult to discourage their charity and humility. Chandran takes an important step towards maturity when he realises the moral futility of deception. He may succeed in deceiving the humble villagers but he learns that self-deception is no answer to the problems of life. However, he is still far from attaining the inner peace and fulfilment he is seeking, if largely unconsciously. His feelings still keep him in bondage; romantic passion has been replaced by an equally irrational anti-idealism. Inwardly he protests too much, convincing himself that he is convinced there is no such thing as love which he dismisses as 'a foolish literary notion' (p.112). Chandran's main mistake is to attempt to disrupt the law of life by entering the Hindu third stage (that of the meditating hermit who seeks after truth and peace) before he has passed through the second stage of the householder.

The early chapters of Part Four portray the disillusioned Chandran in the role of detached rationalist.

The basis of his new philosophy is that 'people married because their sexual appetite had to be satisfied and there must be somebody to manage the house' (p.123). But his striving for the Hindu way of non-attachment is still artificial. Although he leads a life of quiet and sobriety, feeling 'that his greatest striving ought to be for a life freed from distracting illusions and hysterics' (p.123), his mind is still deploying ideal concepts as vehicles for escaping from reality and as amatory substitutes. He has yet to cure his melancholy:

> ...something or other was sure to remind him of Malathi and trouble him. At such moments he fumigated his mind with reflections: this is a mischievous disturbance; this is false; these thoughts of Malathi were unreal because Love is only a jb brain affection; it led me to beg and cheat; to desert my parents; it is responsible for my mother's extra wrinkles and grey hairs, for my father's neglect of the garden; and a poor postmaster is a shirt and a dhoti less on account of my love. (p.124)

Here, as in Chandran's preoccupation with revision-study timetables, we see that a zealous and somewhat exaggerated conscience is an essential ingredient of his character.

Narayan makes a point of ending The Bachelor of Arts on an unspectacular true-to-life note, with Chandran gradually committing himself to life and welcoming the customary obligations and ties of life.

He enthusiastically devotes himself to his work as Malgudi agent for the Madras Daily Messenger; 'there was the usual denunciation of Love, Marriage, and Woman, but at the same time there was a lack of fire in the denunciation' (p.154). Chandran affects worldly indifference by tossing a coin to decide whether to marry. The toss dictates that he should. Arrangements are proceeded with and a bridal inspection follows. The scene is in keeping with the comedy of manners framework, the social milieu background and the emphasis on character, which constitute the main structure of the novel. Also, the scene demonstrates that Chandran's newly-acquired cynicism is only skin deep and that underneath he is still an eager lover looking forward to all the joys and satisfactions of conjugal love:

His heart gave a wild beat, and, as he thought, stopped. "Her figure is wonderful," some corner of his mind murmured. "Her face must also be wonderful, but I can't see it very well, she is looking at the ground." Could he shriek out to Mr. Jayarama Iyer, sitting in the chair on his right and uttering inanities at this holy moment: "Please ask you daughter to look up, sir. I can't see her face"? (p.160)
He saw her face now. It was divine; there was no doubt about it. He secretly compared it with Malathi's and wondered what he had seen in the latter to drive him so mad.... (p.161)

It is a completely conventional and orthodox marriage, with the bride returning to her parents' home

until it is time for her to come to live with her husband. They exchange ecstatic letters. And the novel ends with Chandran completely in love, but left suspended in emotional mid-air as he pedals off into the distance to see his wife from whom he hasn't heard for six days; six days which seem to him an eternity.

The Bachelor of Arts is a comedy of innocence, immaturity and premature (but temporary) renunciation, and is satisfyingly resolved by Chandran's commitment to the normal satisfactions of life. Taken together, Swami and Friends and The Bachelor of Arts portray the Hindu first stage of the scholar, in childhood and early manhood respectively. The Bachelor of Arts ends with Chandran entering the second stage. It is not surprising, therefore, that Narayan's third novel, The Dark Room (1938), is a domestic novel which focuses on the second Hindu stage of life.

The Dark Room is a story of married life which, like Kamala Markandaya's A Silence of Desire, examines the marriage relationship in a state of crisis. Ramani and Savitri have been married for fifteen years and have three school-age children. It is evident at the beginning of the novel that the marriage has not been idyllic, at least for some time, although husband and wife have managed to maintain a more-or-less harmonious relationship—a fluctuating surface tranquility combined with occasional deeper satisfactions. However, the

seeds of discord have been sown for some time. Ramani is moody and selfish; Savitri sensitive, shy, and intimidated by aggressive masculinity. He is accustomed to the role of lord and master, benevolent or harsh, as his wife's behaviour warrants; demanding according to his wants. He has failed to appreciate that his wife has become increasingly unhappy, frustrated, and neglected; that her desire to please him has been thwarted by his unpredictable behaviour. More frequently of late she has sought refuge in the dark room, but Ramani, with a superior flourish, dismisses this as sulking. The dark room, in fact, symbolises the emotional emptiness and domestic claustrophobia which can result from a circumscribing marital orthodoxy.

Accordingly, the main theme of The Dark Room concerns the necessity for sympathetic understanding of the woman's role, and implies that contentment in marriage depends upon an enlightened and compassionate approach to the traditional precept of wifely submission. This subject is first touched upon directly when Savitri's friend, Janamma, puts a stop to one of Savitri's dark-room withdrawals by shaming her with a lecture on the duties of woman:

"...I have never opposed my husband or argued with him at any time in my life. I might have occasionally suggested an alternative, but nothing more. What he does is right. It is a wife's duty to feel so."

...Janamma went on in this strain for an hour more, recounting instances of the patience of wives: her own grandmother who slaved cheerfully for her husband, had three concubines at home; her aunt who was beaten every day by her husband and had never uttered a word of protest for fifty years; another friend of her mother's who was prepared to jump into a well if her husband so directed her; and so on, till Savitri gradually began to feel very foolish at the thought of her own resentment, which now seemed very insignificant. (pp.45-6)

However, the reader's sympathy is with Savitri, not Ramani. She has tried to be the dutiful self-effacing wife society has trained her to be. She cannot be blamed for finding Ramani's petty tyrannies irksome, nor for feeling distraught over his infidelity.

Her leaving home is an impulsive irresponsible act, but quite understandable, for Narayan reveals the pressures which have made Savitri feel desperate enough to bring her to the brink of suicide and later envisage permanent separation from her husband and children. Narayan refrains from sentimentalising her predicament; he remains detached and unprejudiced. His sympathy is tempered by an awareness of Savitri's shortcomings, an awareness which combines gentle irony with mild compassion. These points can be verified by a close, brief look at her situation and conduct.

The first six chapters of The Dark Room provide the psychological background in the light of which Savitri's fight with her husband and subsequent walking-out are explicable. Ramani is objectionable because of his bullying manner, his critical running commentaries about household organization, his professional vanity, his moodiness (Savitri and his children learnt to anticipate his evening moods according to the car-horn nuances with which he announced his arrival), the pride with which he publicly 'possesses' his wife, his emotional inconsistency towards his children, and of course his fatuous, hypocritical pursuit of the seductive Shanta Bai.

The lucid objectivity with which Savitri's reactions are presented is exemplified in the account of her near-death-scene on the edge of the Sarayu. She is rather pathetic and the author is almost droll. Theatrically, she imagines herself going to Rangoon to say farewell to her sister, then jumping off the ship on the way back. The more she blames Shanta Bai for the breakdown of her marriage, the more tender are her thoughts for Ramani. She steps into the river to drown herself but, at the last minute, decides she ought to go back home. But she topples in and would have drowned had not a passing thief by night and village blacksmith by day (Mari) rescued her. At first Mari thought she was an apparition, and when in her delirium Savitri coincidentally calls out 'Thief' he superstitiously believes she

possesses the power of making the truth transparent. The wry tone of the episode is in keeping with Narayan's perception of the ironic blending of foolishness and sadness which is so often a part of life.

Mari takes Savitri to his village where she scrupulously refuses to accept charity; she seeks asylum in the local temple, offering her services as a menial in turn for a roof over her head and a little rice. Here once more is the familiar pattern of premature renunciation of human ties and obligations: Savitri seeks the ascetic way out of marital unhappiness, hoping to numb her senses and memory by dedicating her life to God. She deludes herself that she is experienced enough to dismiss 'attachment' as 'foolish', and foolishly, immaturely believes she is ready for the third ashrama. While she at first marvels at her transformation from Lawley housewife to hermit, and feels triumphant that she is not obliged to anyone for charity, in fact she only lasts one day and night in her new life of renunciation; she nostalgically longs for her children, and returns home. The extreme brevity of her social rebellion and renunciation is comment enough in both her craving for human love and fulfilment, the power of social indoctrination underlying attitudes of acceptance, and the tolerable sadness of her existence.

Narayan's handling of the conclusion to The Dark Room is worthy of note. Savitri is happy to be home; the children are delighted; Ramani is in a good mood; a surface joviality prevails between husband and wife. But she says to herself: "A part of me is dead" (p.156). Ramani's ego has suffered a jolt but he is otherwise unchanged. Thus Narayan demonstrates that in his novel, as in life, a complex human relationship rarely changes overnight and that radical readjustments between two people who have been involved with each other for a number of years are as unlikely as a sudden change of character. Further, Narayan closes the novel with an incident which emphasises both the degree of Savitri's submission to social conditioning, and that the part of her which is 'dead'—sadly—is a natural responsiveness of the heart. She sees Mari go past her house, crying out "Locks repaired!", and is haunted by his 'hungry face' and the memory of his wife's kindness and friendliness. Savitri is about to send for Mari, but checks the impulse thinking "Why should I call him here? What have I?" (p.157). In that one gesture of rejection is summed up the blighting repression, the denial of the instinct of love, which a strict code and rigid social system can force upon the individual. Society and the human heart can also be like dark rooms.

Examined collectively, Narayan's short stories and his first three novels indicate that one of his

primary aims as a writer is to reveal the individual in terms of the social codes which have subtly influenced his upbringing and continually affect his judgements, attitudes and actions. We have seen how the characters of Chandran and Savitri have been conceived and worked out on this basis. In The Dark Room Savitri's somewhat sad fate is placed in ironic and comic relief by Narayan's characterisation of Ramani and Shanta Bai, both of whom are also presented in terms of their fall from code grace. The touch of absurdity, the mock-romantic, about Ramani's affair with Shanta Bai bares the main elements in their respective characters. Shanta Bai is the archetypal femme fatale who relies on sexual opportunism and theatrical 'tragic' helplessness to make her way in a masculine world. She flatters man, encouraging him to believe that she is entirely dependent on him and his largesse of understanding. This is how she manipulates him. Thus, she deflates Ramani from the start. He pompously interviews her when she applies for a job, but very quickly she accomplishes a reversal of roles and he is at the mercy of the applicant. She is expert at cultivating the Garbo manner—'the temperamental heroine and the impending doom' (p.66)—and in exploiting Ramani's amorous sentimentality. Normally tough-hearted and hard-headed, he accepts completely the string of cliches that constitutes her philosophy of life. His is the oldest folly in the world. She says "I can't exist without a copy of The Rubaiyat"

(p.113), and he thinks her a splendid creature.

Ramani emerges as a code hypocrite. He justifies his liaison with Shanta Bai on the grounds of his noble compassion for a virtuous woman in distress. (In India — every woman, other than a man's wife, is his sister.) A succession of ironies expose Ramani's hypocritical nature. Expecting Savitri to be subservient, in Shanta Bai's case he extols the equal rights of woman; whereas Shanta Bai twists him round her little finger, when he thinks of his wife he prides himself on the thought that 'It would be a very bold person indeed who tried to dicate to him' (p.104). While panting for promiscuous experiences with Shanta Bai, he pretends to devout reverence for the Indian tradition of purity of womanhood; in fact, to Ramani the subservience of the wife is personally convenient and satisfying to his ego:

> He was entirely self-made, and that proved one was right and needed no advice from others, and least of all from a wife. Of course, he granted, there was some sense in the women's movement: let them by all means read English novels, play tennis, have their All-India Conference and go to the pictures occasionally; but that should not blind them to their primary duties of being wives and mothers; they musn't attempt to ape the Western women, all of whom, according to Ramani's belief, lived in a chaos of promiscuity and divorce. He held that India owed its spiritual eminence to the fact that the people here realised that a woman's primary duty (also a divine privilege) was being a wife and a mother, and what woman retained the right of being called a wife who disobeyed her husband? Didn't all the ancient epics and Scriptures enjoin upon woman the strictest identification with her

husband? He remembered all the heroines of the epics whose one dominant quality was a blind, stubborn following of their husbands, like the shadow following the substance. (p.105)

In the background of this train of thought, of course, is a complex historical structure. Ramani epitomises a common male attitude (more prevalent in 1935, the time-setting of the novel, than now); a hypocritical traditionalism with one law for the women and another for the man. Thus, Narayan implies in the above passage, in evaluating the social code human motives must always be taken into account. A code is neither good nor bad but humans make it so.

Narayan's awareness, in his early work, of the aborted element in human undertakings provides a profound and realistic basis for both comedy and pathos. In this respect, Chandran's romantic misfortune, Ramani's adulterous inexpertise, Savitri's near-drowning and her attempt to renounce worldly attachments (and many comparable situations) contribute to Narayan's evolving vision and growing artistic maturity, and indicate the extent to which later imaginative and distinctive novels like <u>The Financial Expert</u> and <u>The Guide</u> have grown out of Narayan's earlier practice of the art of fiction.

3 GRATEFUL TO LIFE AND DEATH

That R.K. Narayan had served his literary apprenticeship in his first three novels—Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937), and The Dark Room (1938)—is evident in the increased maturity of his fourth, Grateful to Life and Death, which was first published in 1945 as The English Teacher. In Grateful to Life and Death Narayan adopted the first-person point of view for the first time in a novel, while justifying with a new deftness his predilection for simple, direct narrative exposition. The autobiographical point of view, handled as it is here with nice pliancy, is appropriate, particularly for the portrayal of the difficult if not impossible aspect of Narayan's subject—life after death—which he attempts with a modest lack of diffidence. However, the supernatural theme is recognisably an authentic expression of the Indian mind and satisfied certain spiritual expectations inherent in Hinduism. Moreover, the skill with which the theme is presented, combined with its intriguing transcendentalism, is

perhaps the most interesting feature of Grateful to Life and Death.

The story is narrated by the central character, Krishnan, and consists largely of two major episodes in his life. The first concerns his life as a College lecturer—his doubts about the value of his profession, preoccupations about what he should be doing in life and the problems of self-fulfilment; the contentment he derives from his wife Susila and their little girl Leela; and the premature death of Susila from typhoid.

The second half of Grateful to Life and Death is mainly an account of Krishnan's spiritual catharsis of despair and salvation. At first all hope and aspiration are no more than the ashes of his wife's funeral pyre, life culminates inexorably in annihilation; his grief is only alleviated by his intense devotion to the three-year-old Leela whom he is determined to bring up with the help only of an old servant woman. However, Krishnan makes two contacts which are instrumental in profoundly changing him, reconciling him to life and death, and resolving his moral dilemmas. The first is a man who, acting as a medium, enables Susila's spirit to communicate with Krishnan; after various doubts and frustrations Krishnan reaches a mature stage of 'self-development' and independently attains momentary union with his spiritually-revealed beloved. The second is Leela's eccentric 'headmaster', whose private school for small children impresses Krishnan as a place where

he can best develop his creative, compassionate, and spiritual inclinations.

By the end of the story Krishnan has accepted the inevitability of the dissolution of human ties (Leela leaves to stay with his mother), has discovered the joy of a meaningful life in the spontaneous world of children (he is going into partnership with the head-master) and has experienced with Susila the harmony of souls which is described in the final words of the novel:

> The boundaries of our personalities suddenly dissolved. It was a moment of rare, immutable joy—a moment for which one feels grateful to Life and Death. (p.213)

Thus Grateful to Life and Death is an intimately personal account of man's quest for a positive philosophy of life and his attainment of spiritual maturity. If it is a characteristically Indian quest with a characteristic Indian solution, Krishnan's predicaments and reactions are universally valid because explicably human. Morally and pictorially his sufferings and salvation (he was never in great danger, one feels) have a down-to-earth Upanishadic grandeur; they follow their destined course without degenerating into sterile essays on the ideals of resignatory saintliness. Nevertheless there are doctrinal and stereotyped moments when the supernatural illusion is strained. The 'great souls' who first communicate with Krishnan seem intent more on satisfying the Indian passion for fantasy solutions to

problems than in providing metaphysical enlightenment: their 'work', they explain, 'is an attempt to turn the other side of the medal of existence, which is called Death', and 'may revolutionize human ideas' (p.129).

But Krishnan's psychic revolution is neither perfunctory nor easily brought about. In practising orthodox spiritual exercises, he experiences normal disappointments; nor is his eventual philosophic calm induced through any improbable distortion of his personality. The author does not permit (even for the sake of comedy) the wiser Krishnan of the end of the book to succumb to bogus or sentimental idealism. Thus, at the College farewell, when Brown platitudinously praises Krishnan and refers to him with a deference disguising incomprehension as "an uncompromising idealist" with "the courage to throw up a lucrative income" (p.210), Krishnan repudiates this pretentiously shallow interpretation of his action:

"I'm retiring, not with a feeling of sacrifice for a national cause, but with a very selfish purpose. I'm seeking a great inner peace." (p.211)

Krishnan's philosophical and spiritual development is rendered with lucid and simple art and it grows out of the natural progression of events as well as of earlier stirrings in his personality. In Chapter One Narayan unobtrusively introduces a few statements that have a deceptive thematic import into contexts not apparently

contrived for this purpose. For example, Krishnan is obliged to set as an essay topic "Man is the master of his own destiny". Although he feels that "this abstract and confounded metaphysic" is an "idiotic theme", viewed in the light of his later experiences and speculations it does point forward to the main theme of Grateful to Life and Death. Moreover, the questions which he blackboards 'to puff up this theme' are in fact the same questions which are later subtley relevant to his own life, which he applies to himself, and to which the novel provides the answers.

> "Man, what is man? What is destiny? How does he overcome destiny? How does destiny overcome? What is fate? What is free will?"—a number of headings which reduced man and his destiny and all the rest to a working formula... (p.12)

For real life there is no such simple reduction; but there is, according to Susila's spirit, the possibility of enlarged understanding founded in faith:

> "At first it will be a matter of belief," I remember her saying. I clung to it fast; "Belief, belief." Above reason, scepticism, and even immediate failures, I clung to it. (p.193)

As Krishnan's pessimistic resignation gradually and ambivalently gives way, through the promise of psychic communion, to 'belief', he sees the problems of death, destiny and free-will in shifting perspective. The most tormenting metaphysical impediment is, as Susila's

spirit puts it, "How can you believe what you can't see?" (p.131). However, under her soothing guidance he experiences 'psychic development'. Advocating, it would seem, the methodology of yoga, she tells Krishnan to prepare himself for direct communication with the spirit world. Although the manner is unfortunately somewhat text-book, the matter is thematically relevant:

"...this communication will restore to you health and better nerves because of the greater harmony that comes into your life; but you must also do your bit to utilize this harmony. You must keep your body and mind in perfect condition, before you aspire to become sensitive and receptive..." (p.174)

Susila describes harmony parabolically in "a picture in words" of the soul of 'one who can see nature and God' (pp.174-5) in the setting of a natural landscape (bird, brook, and sunset) supernaturally illumined. While acknowledging that life and life-after-death are "two totally different mediums of existence" (p.174), she explains that the former has meaning in terms of the latter and that attainment of this meaning necessitates renunciation (the removal of "obstructions"):

"The responses of our world are immediate and fine; you have a glimpse of it only in your striving...here it is an achievement. Your striving itself is proof of its reality here; to be realized when the obstructions of your state are cleared...." (p.175)

As the months pass, Krishnan is increasingly convinced that 'self-development', the main programme in his life, 'was a perpetual excitement, ever promising some new riches in the realm of experience and understanding' (p.193).

The culmination of Krishnan's development provides the climax of the novel. The faith and discipline he has acquired result in free-will and spiritual perception, and at the end he wills Susila's materialised presence:

> I softly called "Susila! Susila, my wife..." with all my being....My mind trembled with this rhythm, I forgot myself and my own existence....When I opened my eyes again she was sitting on my bed looking at me with an extraordinary smile in her eyes. (p.212)

Although this vision is presented in corporeal terms (Susila cuts off a piece of the jasmine Krishnan offers her and puts it in her hair), we are not obliged to assume he sees her in a purely physical sense. Narayan's method of representing the transcendental unknown expressly in terms of the real known is audaciously simple. Nevertheless, the literalness of his spiritual pictures is symbolic rather than naturalistic. If at times the subtle unsubtlety of the method seems to make Susila behave more like an animated philosophical treatise than an immortal soul, there is perhaps no good reason why this effect cannot be attributed to the receiving minds of the medium and, later, Krishnan. Poetry gets lost in the translation. What counts is the conviction

of Krishnan's belief in Susila as a spiritual entity.

Granting these qualifications, then, if would seem that Narayan, at the end of the novel, intended to show concretely that Krishnan finally achieves spiritual sight:

> Her complexion had a golden glow, her eyes sparkled with a new light, her saree shimmered with blue interwoven with "light" as she had termed it. (p.212)

Light is the key word and conveys the traditional concept of spiritual illumination. The soul's "greatest ecstasy", according to Susila, "is in feeling the Divine Light flooding us" (p.147). Another leitmotif is the reference to jasmine:

> There was an overwhelming fragrance of jasmine surrounding her. "Still jasmine-scented!" I commented. (p.213)

Throughout the novel jasmine and Susila are associated (see pp.18,57,64,70). So strong is this association in the first half of the novel, the spiritual evocation of the intangible Susila in the second half is quite often accomplished most suggestively through jasmine identification. Thus, for example, when Susila describes her spiritual appearance to Krishnan she makes special reference to the jasmine which she wears in her hair for his sake (p.150).

Jasmine is more than an imagistic device, however. It contains a hint of a vital and (from a traditional Indian point of view) valid philosophical assumption which underlines the mysticism of Grateful to Life and Death: namely, that the nature of the soul is such that the material and the immaterial 'mediums' are intervolved through some kind of system of correspondences, and that a particularly important correspondence occurs in the case of the five senses. The novel's mystical communications are based on the notion that the bodily senses are imperfect material imitations of their perfect spiritual counterparts, the latter being overwhelmingly more intense, sensitive and revealing. Hence the significance of the sense of smell as an invisible link between present and past, material and immaterial worlds, and the importance of jasmine as a symbol of correspondence.

Krishnan's perusal of his dead wife's box of scents induces a reverie in which, for a brief moment uniting present and past, the phials release the 'essence' of Susila's 'personality, the rustle of her dress, her footfalls, laughter, her voice, and the light in her eyes, the perfume of her presence'; he reflects that smell is the "subtlest" of the senses because "it takes you back to the core of your experience" (pp.145-6). The sensory correspondence between spiritual and material

is one of 'essence' and derivative not unlike the Platonic correspondence between Idea and Form. Self-development necessitates the refinement of the senses to the pitch where they can be tuned in on a spiritual wave-length, as it were; the above occasion shows that refinement in Krishnan in a preliminary phase.

When, at their next sitting, Krishnan asks Susila why she says she is wearing perfume, she replies: "Just to enable you to have the most complete idea of our state of existence" (p.147). Her account of spiritual ecstasy—divine flood-light, music transporting souls to 'higher planes', the greater intensity of things spiritual—is comprehensible in terms of correspondence. Accordingly, Susila adopts the practice of describing her 'appearance' at the close of each communication.

One night when Krishnan comes close to experiencing the fusion of bodily and spiritual vision, sensory correspondence almost spans the metaphysical gulf. Narayan is aesthetically deliberate in providing examples: (1) sight..."My dress tonight is a shimmering blue interwoven with light and stars." ('blue', 'light' and 'stars' symbolise the soul, in keeping with traditional definition, as a luminous and eternal entity); (2) sound..."by and by, you will hear my bangles clanking"; (3) touch..."when you lift your arm you touch me"; (4) smell..."If you want any evidence of my presence, pluck about ten jasmine buds and keep them near your

pillow tonight. Before I go away I will take their scent with me" (p.150). These correspondences are the basis of harmony and union: on his way home that 'dark night' Krishnan can 'sense' Susila's 'presence' which (as luminous soul) obliterates 'darkness', 'distance and loneliness'. He now knows 'more' than the cremation fire, than death.

In Indian philosophy the senses have been thought of as functions of pure consciousness; the gross elements and the sensory organs are said to have evolved from the five essences of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch. Thus the pure consciousness of the liberated soul consists partly of spiritual sensory experience. Hence Susila's emphasis on "thought" and "meditation":

"Our life is one of thought and experience. Thought is something which has solidity and power..." (p.147).

The following communication sums up Narayan's philosophic idea of mystical experience in Grateful to Life and Death:

"Between thought and fulfilment there is no interval. Thought is fulfilment, motion and everything....In your state a thought to be realized must always be followed by effort directed towards conquering obstructions and inertia—that is the nature of the material world. But in our condition no such obstruction exists. When I think of you or you of me I am at your side. Music directly transports us. When I think of a garment, it is on me....I think of the subtlest perfume and it already pervades my being...the real parts of the thing is that which is in thought and it can never be lost or destroyed or put away." (p.149)

Although Grateful to Life and Death is clearly grounded in hereditary belief and in the Illusion-Reality tradition of Indian metaphysics, in it life is experienced in concrete human terms and is not lost, except in one or two instances, in intellectual abstraction. Nor is the novel blatantly experimental; Narayan did not abandon the realistic convention. In fact he employs the same techniques of realism in the supernatural sections as elsewhere, and the earlier domestic atmosphere pervades the later spiritual relationship.

A thematic corollary of Krishnan's developing spiritual identity is his quest for a sense of values. This quest has a personal aspect——Krishnan's desire to do congenial work which would make existence meaningful for him; and a cultural aspect—the need for an Indian educational system based on valid psychological and moral principles and compatible with indigenous wisdom. Eventually both issues are resolved in a beautiful vision of childhood.

When caring for Leela becomes Krishnan's 'chief occupation in life', he learns that having 'sole responsibility for a growing creature' is 'noble and exciting' (p.116). That such an occupation can be a most morally satisfying life's work he learns from the 'headmaster'. (Because the headmaster and the medium are men who are not limited and consumed by 'self', Narayan does not give them names.) In the school

Krishnan discovers creation, knowledge and joy in their essence. The 'glittering alphabets and pictures drawn by children...seemed to explain the created universe' (p.140). According to the headmaster, adults have much to learn from children, especially the "meaning of the word joy—in its purest sense" (p.141). Children, he says, "are the real gods on earth" (p.153); Susila claims they "see...the souls of persons" (p.135). The headmaster's "Leave Alone System" of education is based on the belief that childhood is the nearest human approximation to the spiritual condition and that the system could be important for "the future of mankind" because it would "retain the original vision" which is "ruined" by the blinding "curse of adulthood" (p.168). The Blakean philosophy of innocence as well as Susila's luminous companionship provide the basis for Krishnan's future.

Krishnan's moral illumination also results in some incisive cultural criticism, particularly of 'a whole century of false education' (p.205) which has made Indians strangers to their own culture. For personal and intellectual reasons, Krishnan decides, as he tells the College Principal, "to do what seems to me work, something which satisfies my innermost aspiration" (pp.207-8). The main themes of Grateful to Life and Death are crystallised in Krishnan's "innermost aspiration".

By presenting his metaphysical and introspective themes in a tragi-comic way, Narayan largely avoids the dangers of pretentious, artificial, or absurd presentation to which such themes are prone. Narayan's comedy is artistic and humane: while heartily accommodating exaggeration, it gives his view of life a sense of proportion; his humour is irresistible, his satire gentle, and his laughter wise. Quite remarkably, his comedy balances the potentially disparate elements in Grateful to Life and Death, particularly: life and death, the real and the supernatural, the cosmic and the particular, tragedy and joy, philosophic seriousness and emotional spontaneity, the author and his narrator.

Even the 'great souls' or 'Helpers' of the after life share Narayan's sense of humour, and they tell Krishnan, on one occasion when Susila is too convulsed with laughter to speak, that she said he should not "take anything too tragically" (p.133). The medium is spiritually receptive and sensitive probably because he is a very mirthful, chubby person. His 'rich quiet' laughter is 'a permanent background against which all his speech and gestures occurred, something like the melody of a veena string' (p.123). Spiritually, then, mirth (or joy) and harmony are indispensably linked.

Nature, which is not only efficient and civic-minded (she is mainly responsible for Malgudi's municipal sanitation), also has a comic spirit, as the medium delightedly observes:

"Tree twigs have a sense of humour and adopt funny shapes. I think it is one of Nature's expressions of humour...." (p.124)

Thus, the comic principle permeates the spiritual universe and the creation as well as the heart of man, and it brings mysticism down to earth. Clearly, Narayan's mysticism of joy is founded on a doctrine of mirth.

But, like all profound comedy, Narayan's carries an imprint of sadness. Thus the headmaster's anticipated demise (on the day of his predicted death he stoically awaits the end) comically parallels Krishnan's sad reflections about his wife's untimely death. However, the astrologer was wrong and, like Krishnan at the end, the headmaster feels re-born.

Similarly, Narayan's sad and comic ironies prevent the life he recreates from withering into grand remoteness. It is both amusingly and pathetically ironical that the domestic life of the headmaster, who finds complete joyous peace with his schoolchildren, is a clamorous hell dominated by a slovenly termagant wife and wayward children over whom he has no control.

As Narayan's comedy affords his view of life proportion, so his comic irony ensures him a detachment sufficient to prevent his sympathy from lapsing into sentimentality. He achieves this where it is most needed: in his use of the autobiographical point of view. By showing Krishnan taking himself too seriously on certain

comic occasions, Narayan prevents himself from taking himself too seriously. In his characterisation of Krishnan, Narayan humorously avoids tedious introspection and the unpleasant excesses of moral egoism, particularly the dishonesty of making unreal cult-like claims to honesty. Indeed at times he seems to parody the technique of the introspective novel. At the same time the author has something important to say and his narrator has something important to learn.

As early as the opening page of Grateful to Life and Death, this efficient balance of subjective narrative form and objective authorial tone is clearly established. In the first paragraph, in fact, Krishnan is presented in a mock-heroic light, examining himself within grand scales of reference; on the one side 'heroic' 'perfection', on the other saintly 'self-criticism'. Nevertheless, he can be as whimsical (at his own expense) as his author: in comparing himself to a cow, he considers (as a good Hindu should) that the comparison may do the cow an injustice. Throughout the novel comic or ironic deflations of Krishnan's introspective seriousness are matched by examples of his capacity for self-ridicule. Thus he confesses to feeling that he has 'discharged a duty assigned to' him 'in some eternal scheme' (p.8) by writing a fifty-line poem about Nature, and that he has contemplated composing a metaphysical poem in which Hell is a hostel bathroom passage.

Narayan's comic characterisation is superb when it shows Krishnan's imagination running away with him. (Narayan's heroes have in common a flair for self-dramatisation or an imagination of personal disaster.) In a stream-of-consciousness association of ideas a minor worry can be transformed into a national calamity in a matter of mental moments. Take, for instance, the occasion when Krishnan was at the railway station awaiting the arrival of Susila and the baby.

> I made a mental note, "Must shout as soon as the train stops: 'Be careful with the baby'." This seemed to my fevered imagination the all-important thing to say on arrival, as otherwise I fancied the child's head was sure to be banged against the doorway....And how many infants were damaged and destroyed by careless mothers in the process of coming out of trains! Why couldn't they make these railway carriages of safer dimensions? It ought to be done in the interests of baby welfare in India. "Mind the baby and the door". (pp.30-1)

Then, simulating disinterested condescension concerning the Station Master's responsibilities, he engages him in conversation, desperately turning it in the direction of his fear that the train won't stop long enough for Susila's disembarkation. At such times the deftness and economy of Narayan's style is impressive, the more so because it reveals a truth of everyday experience. The emotional range of this taut style is another merit. Take, for example, the conclusion to Chapter Three which is the highest pitch of tragic mood in the novel.

Temporarily changing the narrative mode, Narayan describes Susila's funeral and Krishnan's grief in diary form, the telegraphese of which (like Hemingway's emotional shorthand at the end of A Farewell to Arms) effectively conveys a grief too deep for words.

Krishnan's flair for self-dramatisation is a trait which pleasingly persists to the end of the novel where, as self-deflation, it comically confirms the reality of his self-development. Krishnan decides that his letter of resignation should be 'a classic in its own way...which would singe the fingers of whoever touched it'. This classic epistle turns out to be, after several drafts, a vitriolic attack on an education system which produces 'cultural morons', a theatrical repetition of stale ideas, which he is too mature not to realise that it does not say what he wants to say:

> I was entangled too much in theories and platitudes and holding forth to all whom it might concern. It was like a rabid attack on all English writers, which was hardly my purpose....It looked like a rehash of an article entitled "Problems of High Education", which appeared again and again in a week-end educational supplement...
> ..."There is something far deeper that I wish to say." (p.206)

Grateful to Life and Death is that "something far deeper".

Although at the end of the novel Krishnan performs the familiar heroic feat of giving up the status symbols for an ethically and morally satisfying way of life, he is not a literary cliché. Free from affectation, he is

an affirmation of the transcendental power of love, however illusory such a power may ultimately prove to be. Certainly it is a power consistent with the traditional beliefs of Krishnan's environment. Krishnan's development follows a recognisable Vedantic path to selfhood. By submitting to the 'law of life', which necessitates the renunciation of attachments, he severs some of the spiritually constricting bonds of Maya. The attempt to arrest the law brings misery and hurt, chief impediments to the inner peace of selfhood.

"We come together only to go apart again. It is one continuous movement....The law of life can't be avoided. The law comes into operation the moment we detach ourselves from our mother's womb. All struggle and misery in life is due to our attempt to arrest this law or get away from it or in allowing ourselves to be hurt by it. The fact must be recognized. A profound unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life...." (p.203)

This submission is in the order of Conrad's "In the destructive element immerse".

Krishnan is not simply an angry-young-man kind of deviant intellectually alienated from his environment. Moreover, that environment seems more substantial for being comically as well as tragically depicted, in both spiritual beauty and sordid elemental detail. The reader cannot forget that Susila probably contracted typhoid because she was accidentally locked in a fly-choked lavatory. Nor can the reader forget that Narayan's

comedy yields a fresh, clear, parabolic view of the human condition. Narayan first proved in Grateful to Life and Death what he more amply demonstrated later in such works as The Financial Expert, The Guide and The Man-eater of Malgudi: that a good comic writer need not sacrifice life for the story or the story for life.

4 THE PRINTER OF MALGUDI

The Printer of Malgudi was first published as Mr. Sampath in 1949. It is not the most accomplished of R.K. Narayan's novels, and its action, though very funny at times, is a little inadequate as a representation of life which is both amusing and true. However, considered from the point of view of Narayan's development as a comic artist, The Printer of Malgudi is an interesting transitional work, and it complements the enlarged consciousness of life evident in his previous novel, Grateful to Life and Death, in which he explored through a newly-sharpened tragi-comic style the metaphysical implications of an anguishing experience. In devising a parabolical setting for the comedy of The Printer of Malgudi, Narayan extended his imaginative horizons. Thus, by the penultimate chapter the author is viewing the story in terms larger than itself—archetypally, in fact.

Up to this point the story has been fairly straightforward. Srinivas, a university graduate who had been

undecided about his professional future, became a newspaper proprietor-editor. His printer, Mr. Sampath, came to regard the paper (The Banner) as his personal responsibility, and, although Srinivas had to discourage him from dabbling in editorial matters, their relationship was soon amicably involved. When Sampath abandoned his trade to become an entrepreneur-director of "Sunrise Pictures", Srinivas reluctantly suspended publication of The Banner but before long found himself, at Sampath's instigation, writing the script for the company's first production, "The Burning of Kama". To the disappointment of Srinivas, a philosophical purist, the film's mythological integrity (it was about the love and marriage of Shiva and Parvathi and Shiva's destruction of Kama the Lord of Love) was sacrificed. Also involved in the production of this Extravaganza were: a kind of Cecil B. De Mille Chief Executive, De Mello of Hollywood; Somu, part financier-producer-director and former Malgudi district board president; Shanti, the femme-fatale leading lady; V.L.G. or Shiva, a devotee of the god who has played the same role in Indian cinema for a quarter of a century; Ravi, a neurotic young artist whom Srinivas befriended and found a job for in the studios.

The relationships of these people became increasingly complicated. Srinivas was disenchanted when his script was mutilated in the interests of romance, music, dance

routines, and comic relief. Somu and Sampath resented each other's influence. Sampath fell in love with Shanti; V.L.G. was impatient of her temperamental turns and the pampering she received; neurotically fixated about a girl whose portrait he had started to paint but couldn't finish because she left Malgudi, Ravi identified this dream girl with Shanti and was driven out of his mind by his hopeless passion for her. This 'chaos of human relationships and activities' (p.244), particularly the erotic mix-up, results in catastrophe. During filming of the last scene, Ravi went beserk; rushing on to the set, he violently embraced Shanti, carried her off, and was not finally subdued until the studios had been reduced to a shambles; film was ruined, Shanti hysterically threw over Sampath and her movie career, and Ravi was released from jail an incommunicative nervous wreck.

The plot is a deliberate parody-pastiche of conventional situations in popular romantic fiction, and "The Burning of Kama" pokes fun at the Hollywood and epic fashions of Indian cinema. ("Golden opportunity to see God himself" is one of the poster advertisements for the film.) On this basis Narayan entertainingly exploits the more external and dramatic qualities of comedy, especially farce, burlesque, satire and caricature. The description of Ravi's fatal disruption of the film, for example, is a straight-out humorous romp:

It was going to be the most expert shot taken. The light-boys looked down from their platforms as if privileged to witness the amours of gods. If the camera ran on for another minute the shot would be over. They wanted to cut this shot first where Shiva's arms went round the diaphanous lady's hips. But it was cut even a few seconds earlier in an unexpected manner. A piercing cry, indistinguishable, unworded, like an animal's, was suddenly heard, and before they could see where it originated, Ravi was seen whizzing past the others like a bullet, knocking down the people in his way. He was next seen on the set, rushing between Shiva's extended arms and Parvathi, and knocking Shiva aside with such violence that he fell amidst his foliage in Kailas in a most ungodly manner. Next minute they saw Parvathi struggling in the arms of Ravi, who was trying to kiss her on the lips and carry her off....

They soon realized that this scene was not in the script. Cries rang out: "Cut." "Power." "Shut down." "Stop." And several people tried to rush into the scene. Ravi attempted to carry off his prize, though she was scratching his face and biting his hands. In the mess someone tripped upon the cables and all the lights went out. Ravi seemed to be seized with a superhuman power. Nobody could get at him. In the confusion someone cried: "Oh! Camera, take care!" "Lights, lights, fools!" Somebody screamed: "The cobra is free; the cobra is creeping here, oh!" People ran helter-skelter in the dark. While they were all searching and running into each other they could hear Ravi's voice lustily ringing out in another part of the studio. And all ran in his direction. (p.236)

Here Narayan uses some of the more popular devices of comic style. Appropriately, the account reads like a film-script conception of the kind of fast-moving

abortive situation dearly beloved in the film industry. Although 'this scene was not in the script', it would fit nicely into a slapstick comedy. Hence the clichés —'piercing cry...like an animal's', 'whizzing past like a bullet', 'ran helter-skelter'; hence also the stock situations—the disruptive agent (Ravi), sudden incongruity and deflated dignity (Shiva as victim of violence, his ungodly fall), and general confusion (darkness, rampage, a cobra loose). If the comedy of The Printer of Malgudi operated only on this obvious level, however, the novel would be less interesting than it is and not nearly so relevant to an appreciation of Narayan's comic art.

But the comedy does function at a deeper level as well, largely because the two central characters, Srinivas and Sampath, are portrayed as real-life people and because comedy for Narayan is a means of revealing the sorrows and many of the serious moral issues beneath life's surface. During the course of the narrative Srinivas phases out of comic involvement into the detachment of 'a mere spectator' (p.221) and as his consciousness more comprehendingly engages some of the fundamental problems of existence he increasingly becomes identifiable with the narrative point of view. Sampath also changes. Srinivas observes that the printer's "old personality...is fast vanishing" (p.222); his former jovial vitality was suffocating beneath the vulgar

'prosperity' and 'new rotundity' of his tycoon exterior and being consumed in his desire to complement his domestic marriage with a social marriage to Shanti. Thus, while the comic action develops, the characters do not remain static.

Furthermore, there is an implicit universality in this story of men who bring destruction upon themselves by losing their heads over a beautiful woman. Unlike Shiva, they have neither the power nor the will to resist Kama and his piercing arrows. And, by the penultimate chapter, we find that The Printer of Malgudi is a fable as well as a farce, that it is conceived, like life, against a legendary background.

In an atmosphere of 'hypnosis', 'chants', 'rhythmic beats', and 'pungent' 'incense', Srinivas witnesses a magician's attempts to cure Ravi through exorcism. A 'sweep of history passed in front of his eyes':

> Srinivas suddenly said to himself: "I might be in the twentieth century B.C. for all it matters, or 4000 B.C." ...His scenario-writing habit suddenly asserted itself. His little home, the hall and all the folk there, Anderson Lane, and, in fact, Malgudi itself dimmed and dissolved on the screen....Presently appeared...Sri Rama, the hero of Ramayana. He was a perfect man, this incarnation of Vishnu. Over his shoulder was slung his famous bow which none could even lift. He was followed by his devoted brother Laxman and Hanuman, the monkey-god. Rama was on his way to Lanka (Ceylon) to battle with evil there, in the shape of Ravana who abducted Sita....He...would wipe out wrong and establish on earth truth, beauty and goodness. (pp.258-9).

Requiring water, Rama made the river Sarayu; subsequently the hamlet of Malgudi sprang up. Thus modern Malgudi has links with a central Hindu myth, and The Printer of Malgudi is a comic distortion of it. Ravi's abduction of Shanti hilariously parallels Ravana's abduction of Sita, and Srivinas plays a Laxman role in his relationship with Sampath (an ironically identifiable Rama, not a worthy hero) and with Ravi. Whimsically, Srivinas's imagination, which had been dedicated to transliterating the Shiva myth on celluloid, now automatically responds to legend cinematically.

As the camera of time rolls, Malgudi is seen to have microcosmic associations with the major phases of India's past.

When the Buddha came this way, preaching his gospel of compassion, centuries later, he passed along the main street of a prosperous village. Men, women and children gathered around him. He saw a woman weeping. She had recently lost her child and seemed disconsolate. He told her he would give her consolation if she could bring him a handful of mustard from any house where death was unknown. She went from door to door and turned away from every one of them. Amongst all those hundreds of houses she could not find one where death was a stranger. She understood the lesson....A little crumbling masonry and a couple of stone pillars, beyond Lawley Extension, now marked the spot where the Buddha had held his congregation....

The great Shankara appeared during the next millenium. He saw on the river-bank a cobra spreading its hood and shielding a spawning frog from the rigor of the midday sun. He remarked: "Here the extremes meet.

> The cobra, which is the natural enemy of the frog, gives it succor. This is where I must build up my temple." He installed the goddess there and preached his gospel of Vedanta: the identity and oneness of God and His creatures.
>
> And then the Christian missionary with his Bible. In his wake the merchant and the soldier—people who paved the way for Edward Shilling and his Engladia Bank. (pp.259-60)

The Buddha episode, with its moral of compassion based on the universality of human suffering, reminds the reader of Srivinas's humane and comic endeavours, both as an editor who within 'twelve pages of foolscap... attempted to set the world right' (p.4), and as a friend to Ravi whom the 'fates seemed to have chosen...for their greatest experiment in messing things up' (p.147). The fable of the extremes meeting in the cobra and the frog provides an analogy, humorously discrepant, of some of the relationships in the novel. Srinivas seeks peace but a hood of discord spreads over him: "Here I am seeking harmony in life, and yet with such a discord at the start of the day itself" (p.42). On another occasion he interprets a trivial hurt he gave his wife as "the original violence which has started a cycle...the despair of Gandhi" (p.118), and sees non-violence 'with a new significance, as one of the paths of attaining harmony in life' (p.119). However, Srinivas's domestic discord seems slight compared with that of the trio, Sampath, Shanti, and Ravi. Significantly, Shanti is

very attached to her cobra-head hand-bag, which, Srinivas remarked to Sampath, "seemed such a symbolic appendage for a beautiful woman" (p.192).

Especially meaningful from a Hindu standpoint is the involvement versus non-attachment situation in which Srinivas finds himself for most of the novel. Sampath is an octopus of gregarious affection. When having lunch in a restaurant he brightens up everyone who goes near him and keeps 'the whole establishment in excellent humor' (p.83). "When a person becomes my customer he becomes a sort of blood relation of mine" (p.86), he tells Srinivas. He introduces Shanti as his cousin!

As Srinivas watches Ravi being exorcised he experiences a revelation—the necessity for a person to achieve his 'true identity'—and now puts his adventures in Hindu perspective. Reflecting on fate and re-incarnation, Srinivas is convinced that to equate the moment with the eternal is absurd, and this realisation frees him from the bonds of involvement:

> Dynasties rose and fell. Palaces and mansions appeared and disappeared. The entire country went down under the fire and sword of the invader, and was washed clean when Sarayu overflowed its bounds. But it always had its rebirth and growth. And throughout the centuries, Srinivas felt, this group was always there: Ravi with his madness, his well-wishers with their panaceas and their apparatus of cure. Half the madness was his own doing, his lack of self-knowledge, his treachery to his own instincts as an artist, which had made him a battle-ground. Sooner or later he shook off his madness and realized his true identity—though not in one birth, at least in a series of them. "What did

it amount to?" Srinivas asked himself as the historical picture faded out. "Who am I to bother about Ravi's madness or sanity? What madness to think I am his keeper?" This notion seemed to him so ridiculous that he let out a laugh.

...The recent vision had given him a view in which it seemed to him all the same whether they thwacked Ravi with a cane or whether they left him alone, whether he was mad or sane—all that seemed unimportant and not worth bothering about....in the rush of eternity nothing mattered. (pp.260-1)

At the end of the novel, when Srinivas 'was once again in danger of getting involved' with Sampath, he achieves his freedom without conceding any more than a gesture of 'Bare humanity' (p.275). Although Srinivas had had a surfeit of Sampath and was re-discovering the enchantment of working on his newspaper, he had felt earlier much more than bare humanity towards the printer. Narayan obviously shares the fascination felt by the editor for the magnetic personality, and as involvement is the stuff of his novels, as it is the stuff of human life, the author's fascination for life is not likely to stop at the extreme of detached harmony. Such Fascination is less consistent with withdrawal than the hope of reconciliation between the cobra and the frog. Sampath's character, however pathetic at the end, was too intriguing to be totally surrendered, and he made good sense when he told Srinivas "man's heart is not a narrow corner" (p.223).

The Printer of Malgudi, then, ends with the two central characters going their divergent ways; Srinivas has survived the encounter and seems to have glimpsed his 'true identity'. As has been suggested, this denouement has been precipitated by the formal synthesis of story and parabolical or archetypal setting whereby Narayan relates comedy, at its deepest levels, to life. Accordingly, it is hardly surprising that Srinivas retrospectively regards his movie associates as 'figures out of a nightmare' (p.251), that he says "They all belong to a previous life" (p.246), and that '"Nonsense —an adult occupation" was one of the outstanding editorials he wrote after The Banner's rebirth' (p.251). Adept at revealing the general in the particular humorously, Narayan achieves his parabolical comedy in characteristically Indian terms. This comic method has a parallel in the intention underlying the "Life's Background" feature in The Banner:

> He had tried to summarize, in terms of modern living, some of the messages he had imbibed from the Upanishads on the conduct of life, a restatement of subjective value in relation to a social outlook. This statement was very necessary for his questioning mind; for while he thundered against municipal or social shortcomings a voice went on asking: "Life and the world and all this is passing—why bother about anything? The perfect and the imperfect are all the same. Why really bother?" He had to find an answer to the question. And that he did in this series. (p.35)

Another Narayan quality which complements his comic imagination is the capacity to experience 'great wonder at the multitudinousness and vastness of the whole picture of life'; at the same time it is a capacity which he is capable of treating ironically:

> ...tracing each noise to its source and to its conclusion back and forth, one got a picture, which was too huge even to contemplate. The vastness and infiniteness of it stirred Srinivas deeply. "That's clearly too big, even for contemplation," he remarked to himself, "because it is in that total picture we perceive God. Nothing else in creation can ever assume such proportions and diversity. This indeed ought to be religion. Alas, how I wish I could convey a particle of this experience to my readers. There are certain thoughts which are strangled by expression. If only people could realize what immense schemes they are components of!" At this moment he heard over everything else a woman's voice saying: "I will kill that dirty dog if he comes near the tap again." (pp.60-1).

Such is the flexibility of Narayan's comedy that it accommodates Srinivas's 'questioning mind' and his own in conjunction with the exposition of serious themes, particularly the identity of the Self, the intricacy of human relationships, the nature and problems of art.

Srinivas's decision to found <u>The Banner</u> resulted from philosophical preoccupations about the Self, and his jocular earnestness is nicely in keeping with Narayan's comic tone. When asked by his future landlord "Who are you?", he replies: "It is a profound question.

What mortal can answer it?" (p.7). Srinivas realises that, to begin with, man has to be more than a mere economic unit if he is to know himself, and he later comes to the conclusion that to understand oneself is to 'understand everything' (p.153). He examines this 'big problem' in the light of the following Upanishadic text: "Knowing the self as without body among the embodied, the abiding among the transitory, great and all-pervading—" (p.11). The Banner is to be his means of searching

...for an unknown stabilizing factor in life, for an unchanging value, a knowledge of the self, a piece of knowledge which would support as on a rock the faith of Man and his peace; a knowledge of his true identity, which would bring no depression at the coming of age, nor puzzle the mind with conundrums and antitheses. (p.171).

Srinivas's connection with the "Sunrise Pictures" group makes him acutely conscious of the 'very intricate mechanism of human relationships' (p.221). He marvels at what he imagines to be a cosmic principle of 'balance' which obtains in all matters of existence, particularly human relationships. A comprehensive view shows, for example, that there are

...things being neither particularly wrong nor right, but just balancing themselves. Just the required number of wrongdoers as there are people who deserved wrong deeds, just as many policemen to bring them to their senses, if possible, and just as many wrongdoers again to keep the police employed, and so on and on in an infinite concentric circle. (p.76)

The relationship between Ravi and Srinivas is a 'concentric circle' which encloses some pertinent observations about the relationship of life to art. As writers, Srinivas and his author both aspire to an impartial and objective artistic ideal, an externalisation of emotion, an objective correlative:

> By externalizing emotion, by superimposing feeling in the shape of images, he hoped to express very clearly the substance of this episode: of love and its purification, of austerity and peace. (p.217)

Thus, in his conception of "The Burning of Kama", Srinivas is a poetic artist:

> Srinivas's imagination was stirred as he narrated the story. He saw every part of it clearly: the God of Love with his five arrows (five senses); his bow was made of sugar cane, his bowstring was of murmuring honey-bees, and his chariot was the light summer breeze. When he attempted to try his strength on the rigorous Shiva himself, he was condemned to an invisible existence. Srinivas read a symbolic meaning in this representation of the power of love, its equipment, its limitation, and saw in the burning of Kama an act of sublimation. (p.125)

Appropriately, Narayan's comic style has effective 'cinematic' qualities. When describing the editor's inspired vision of the film medium, Narayan may well have been giving expression to his own consciousness of the artistic limitations of language as well as of the basically dramatic nature of comedy. 'Ideas',

Srinivas reflected, 'were to march straight on from him in all their pristine strength, without the intervention of language: ideas, walking, talking and passing into people's minds as images' (p.116).

The Srinivas-Ravi relationship also gives rise to a witty play upon the maimed genius and empathetic patron convention. Thus melodramatic romanticism is expertly turned to comic account:

> He was no longer a petty, hag-ridden bank clerk, or an unwelcome thoughtless visitor, but a personality, a creative artist, fit to take rank among the celestials.
>
> Srinivas knew what silent suffering was going on within that shabby frame. He knew that an inspiration had gone out of his life. He had no doubt a home, mother, and brothers and sisters, but all that signified nothing....Srinivas very well knew that he came there only in the hope of news about his lost love... (p.54)

Ravi also serves to demonstrate the unreliability of the human element in artistic creation, particularly the anarchic consequences of passionate intensity.

In fusing action, fable and theme into a comic whole Narayan uses Srinivas as a unifying agent, a sensitive consciousness at the heart of the novel. Accordingly he employs a limited third person point of view, one of his favourite narrative devices. The author is not as austere as his main character wants

to be, for his comedy is liberally spiced with the entertainment equivalents of dance, music and light relief to which Srinivas objects in "The Burning of Kama". On the other hand, the author infuses Srinivas with his own comic spirit as is shown by the characterisation of the opening pages. The editor is well aware of the 'comicality', 'an odd mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous', in his 'bombast' (p.5).

And in the final analysis The Printer of Malgudi entertainingly reveals R.K. Narayan as a comedian of the sublime and the ridiculous.

5 COMEDY OF MANNERS AND ARCHETYPES

The Financial Expert (1952), Waiting for the Mahatma (1955), The Guide, (1958), The Man-eater of Malgudi (1961), and The Sweet-Vendor (1967) comprise an achievement in the art of fiction which ensures R.K. Narayan a secure place among contemporary novelists of merit. Whereas many modern English and American novelists working in comic or picaresque modes have tended to be self-consciously intellectual or anti-intellectual, academic or anti-institutional, Narayan's sensibility has remained wholesomely independent of such secondary responses to life as we associate with terms like 'academic' or 'anti-intellectual'. In his work Narayan can be himself without strain, unlike self-afflicted writers like Dylan Thomas, Kingsley Amis, John Updike, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Allen Ginsberg. His comedy is not nervously manufactured nor ostentatiously extrovert, as is often the case with present-day attempts at comic narrative in fictional or free-verse prose. Narayan doesn't imprison his imagination in social or political

messages, because he doesn't have any. Moral or social assessments come by way of implication, not advocacy; his ethical intelligence is not exterior to his story, characters and social materials. His fiction is all texture, language and life in apparently unpremeditated conjunction. He presents the character of Indian life, not like so many Indian writers a theory of it. He accepts life—sensitively, gratefully, whimsically. He never seeks to escape life, nor to evade it through rationalisation, impassioned flight, or deliberate distortion.

These are some of the reasons why, as William Walsh says, Narayan's genre is 'the serious comedy',[50] why Narayan's irony is one of 'recognition' not 'correction', why the 'naivete of being human...is the daring subject of this decidedly self-effacing writer'.[51] This humane comedy has two main expressions which, for the sake of convenience, can be described as comedy of manners and comedy of archetypes. The term comedy of manners has the disadvantage of having already been defined in English literature almost solely in terms of the wit and satire of the Restoration dramatists and, later, of Oscar Wilde. Yet 'manners', after all, suggest a wide variety of social conventions and fashions, and in the Indian context

50 A Human Idiom, p.136.
51 ibid., p.135.

have provided a rich supply of human discrepancies and ironies. In this sense, therefore, the complications of arranging a marriage in The Bachelor of Arts, or the conversational protocol and rhetorical strategies of a business deal in The Financial Expert, can be described aptly as comedy of manners.

By comedy of archetypes, we can define a different order of comic vision in Narayan's novels. Narayan's comedy is generally both profound, and profoundly Indian, because it is firmly focused on the social and cultural traditions. Thus some of the archetypes or race motives peculiar to Hinduism—compulsive cultural and social behaviour patterns—have provided Narayan with a primary source for the characterisations and crises of circumstance which are a feature of his fiction. The comic irony and incongruity whereby Raju is mistaken for a holy man has verve and universal interest largely because the situation has an archetypal perspective to which the reader's imagination automatically inclines. In this instance the comedy is based on the archetype of withdrawal, renunciation and non-attachment; there is humour in the unconventional accidental way in which the archetype possesses Raju, and comic nobility in the way he ultimately conforms to the cultural motivation and behaviour pattern. A different, but equally natural, kind of archetypal comedy gives The Man-eater of Malgudi a distinctive

flavour and structural coherence; the main basis, here, is the rakshasa parallel, a mythic archetype which correlates human actions and cosmic motives.

Some aspects of satire and witty observation which are associated with the comedy of manners convention are delightfully exemplified in the scenes from Waiting for the Mahatma which describe the official reception for Gandhi given by Malgudi's dignitaries. Scrutiny of Narayan's presentation of these scenes shows that he unites a witty ability to graph attitudes and manners along a curve of absurdity while remaining shrewdly faithful to human nature. Pretension, hypocrisy, starched dignity, pomposity, vanity, bombast, and exaggerated formality, of course, are among the favourite targets of the satirist. But what, in the present example, is fresh about Narayan's satire (apart from its unstrained truthfulness) is its distinctive Indian quality. Because the Malgudian absurdities are measured against the Mahatma's humanity, and because he has been taken straight from life, the satire is both credible and clarifying.

The main satirical targets are the Municipal Chairman, Mr. Natesh, and the District Collector. Natesh is condemned out of his own mouth when he proposes to the Reception Committee that Gandhi be invited to stay in 'his palatial house, "Neel Bagh", in the aristocratic Lawley Extension':

His arguments as to why he alone should be Mahatmaji's host seemed unassailable, "I have spent two lakhs on the building, my garden and lawns alone have cost me twenty-five thousand rupees so far. What do you think I have done it for? I am a simple man, sir, my needs are very simple. I don't need any luxury. I can live in a hut, but the reason why I have built it on this scale is that I should be able for at least once in my lifetime, to receive a great soul like Mahatmaji. This is the only house in which he can stay comfortably when he comes to this town. Let me say without appearing to be boastful that it is the biggest and the best-furnished house in Malgudi, and we as people of Malgudi have a responsibility to give him our very best; how can we house him in any lesser place?"[52]

The sequence of events is clearly arranged to advantage by a comic opportunist, though the author maintains the illusion that he is merely an invisible witness accurately reporting what he sees. That 'custodian of British prestige', the District Collector, is too typical not to contribute to the ludicrous pattern. 'It was a point of professional honor for him to say Mr. Gandhi and not Mahatma' (p.34). If Natesh is the fool, the District Commissioner is made to appear the foolish foil:

When the Chairman read his address of welcome at the elaborately constructed archway outside the railway station he could hardly be heard, much to his chagrin. He had spent a whole week composing the text of the address with the help of a local journalist, adding

52 Michigan State University Press, 1955, p.33. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

whatever would show off either his patriotism or the eminent position Malgudi occupied in the country's life. The Collector had taken the trouble to go through the address before it was sent for printing in order to make sure that it contained no insult to the British Empire, that it did not hinder the war effort, and that it in no way betrayed military secrets. He had to censor it in several places: where the Chairman compared Malgudi to Switzerland (the Collector scored this out because he felt it might embarrass a neutral state); a reference to the hosiery trade (since the Censor felt this was a blatant advertisement for the Chairman's goods and in any case he did not want enemy planes to come looking for this institution thinking it was a camouflage for the manufacture of war material); and all those passages which hinted at the work done by Gandhiji in the political field. The picture of him as a social reformer was left intact and even enlarged; anyone who read the address would conclude that politics were the last thing that Mahatmaji was interested in. (p.36)

This is just about as close to overt political comment as Narayan ever comes, but regarded simply as political observation this passage is as effective as a handful of propaganda novels by lesser talents.

The scene comes to a satiric climax at "Neel Bagh". The comedy of manners style is evident in Natesh's elaborate attempts to impress Gandhi and in the incongruities of the Chairman's pretentiousness. Whereas the massive cast iron gates at the entrance are imitations of those at Buckingham Palace, inside Natesh's house 'khaddar hangings' were substituted 'for the gaudy chintz that had adorned his doorways and windows' and

portraits of nationalist leaders for 'the pictures of hunting gentry, vague gods and kings, and...the picture of George V's wedding' (p.39). We notice Narayan's discriminating eye for detail: the 'discreetly' procured 'picture of Krishna discoursing to Arjuna on Bhagavad-Gita' in deference to Gandhi's well known 'bias' towards that text (p.39); the Chairman's efforts to secure khaddar garments for himself and family, including a near-hundred-mile drive 'within the city in order to search for a white khaddar cap to fit his six-year-old son's dolichocephalic head' (p.39); the display of oranges from the Chairman's Mempi estates; Gandhi declining orange juice because 'it was not his hour for taking anything' (p.41);' the Mahatma distributing Natesh's fruit to the school-children; the Chairman's chagrin 'at the thought that the event was developing into a children's party' (p.41) and at people swarming over his garden and 'plucking flowers in his annual bed, which had been tended by his municipal overseers' (p.40).

As this kind of detail is distinctively part of the occasion, descriptively and psychologically, the universality of such occasions is all the more forcibly brought home to the reader. Gandhi may be peculiar to India, but Natesh is to be found everywhere. Further, the structuring of the scene around Gandhi as self-effacing protagonist and Natesh as self-appointed deuteragonist

creates a moral contrast whereby Narayan draws attention to such important human values as love and humility. In ridiculing that type of insincere humbug official who attempted to bathe in Gandhi's glory, attention is drawn to the Mahatma's magical humanity. The characterisation of Gandhi in this scene demonstrates how he was such an embarrassment to the British authorities and caste-conscious Indians. Similarly Narayan is ethically discriminating in his use of irony —particularly with respect to Natesh's loss of limelight to an untouchable boy, and Gandhi's decision to stay in a hut in Malgudi's untouchable colony instead of in the Chairman's mansion. The irony scores properly at the expense of what always should be exposed: social hypocrisy and man's inhumanity to man.

That the above qualities, attitudes, and stylistic nuances are conveyed in a crisp consistent tone—a tone which can be described as Indian comedy of manners—is best demonstrated through quotation:

> The Chairman's blood boiled. Of course people must like poor people and so on, but why bring in such a dirty boy, an untouchable, up the steps and make him so important? For a moment he felt a little annoyed with Mahatmaji himself, but soon suppressed it as a sinful emotion. He felt the need to detach himself..."Oh, Lord, all the world's gutters are on this boy, and he is going to leave a permanent stain on that Kashmir counterpane." The boy...nestled close to the Mahatma, who was smoothing out his matted hair with his fingers, and was engaged in an earnest conversation with him. The Chairman was unable to catch the trend of their talk. He stepped nearer, trying to listen with all reverence. The

reward he got for it was a smile from the Mahatma himself. The boy was saying: "My father sweeps the streets."

"With a long broom or a short broom?" the Mahatma asked.

The boy explained, "He has both a long broom and a short broom." He was spitting out the seeds of an orange. The Mahatma turned to someone and explained: "It means that he is both a municipal sweeper and that he has scavenging work to do in private houses also. The long broom ought to be the municipal emblem."

...

"That's a very clever boy," Mahatmaji said. "I'm very happy to see you. But you must not spit those pips all over the place, in fact you must never spit at all. It's very unclean to do so, and may cause others a lot of trouble. When you eat an orange, others must not notice it at all. The place must be absolutely tidy even if you have polished off six at a time." He laughed happily at his own quip, and then he taught the boy what to do with the pips, how to hide the skin, and what to do with all the superfluous bits packed within an orange. The boy laughed with joy. All the men around watched the proceedings with respectful attention. (pp.43-4)

Balance, measure, proportion: these terms are applicable to the comic tone and the centrality of human issues in the above passage. The socially-suppressed discomforture of the sycophant is weighed against the sensibility of a saint who beams with down-to-earth humour. Although many critics have found Narayan's portrait of Gandhi unconvincing, Gandhi does come alive in the above scene—particularly as a reformer interested in untouchables as individual persons, as a teacher who influences others by example and in the context of

ordinary everyday activities, and as a 'great soul' with a comic sense who understands the holiness of 'joy' and finds it in the company of children.

The culmination of the scene (as we see below) testifies to the self-effacing confidence with which Narayan artistically presents his own reverence for Gandhi strictly within human limits and in terms of a specific situation. Satire, irony, comedy of manners, and reverence for life are blended in the right proportions as the scene advances to the following climax, with Gandhi having said he will take the untouchable boy home in the rich man's car and suggesting that the Chairman would also "like" to see the "young man's House":

> "Now?" asked the Chairman in great consternation. He mumbled, "shall we not go there tomorrow?"
>
> "No, I've offered to take this child home...I'd like to see his father, too, if he can be met anywhere on the way."
>
> Mahatmaji gave his forefinger to the young boy to clutch and allowed himself to be led down the veranda's steps. The Chairman asked dolefully, "Won't you come in and have a look round my humble home?"
>
> "I know how it will be. It must be very grand. But would you not rather spare an old man like me the bother of walking through those vast spaces? I'm a tired old man. You are very hospitable. Anyway, come along with us to this little man's home. If I feel like it, you will let me stay there."
>
> The Chairman mumbled, "I hoped—" But Gandhiji swept him aside with a smile: "You will come along with me, too. Let me invite you to come and stay with me in a hut."...
>
> The warmth of Mahatma's invitation made him forget his problems as a Chairman and his own responsibilities. Otherwise he would not have become oblivious of the fact that the sweepers' colony was anything but a showpiece.

Not till the Collector later sought him out and arraigned him for his lapse did it occur to him what a blunder he had committed....Not till his wife later attacked him, did he remember his omission in another direction. She said in a tone full of wrath, "There I was waiting, dressed as you wanted, with that boy, and you simply went away without even calling us!"

"Why couldn't you have come out?" he asked idiotically.

"How could I, when you had said I must wait for your call?" She sobbed "With the great man at our house, I'd not the good fortune even to go before him. And that child—what a disappointment for him!" (pp.44-5)

Appropriately, the deflation of the Chairman is in proportion to the extent to which Gandhi is revealed in his disarming shrewdness, frankness and sincerity. Utterly characteristic of Narayan is the attention to human feelings evident in the tearful disappointment of Natesh's wife and child. It is a neat touch, in keeping with the prevailing irony and Narayan's general catholicity of human awareness. The woman's feelings are precisely glimpsed against the implied background of her thwarted social grandeur and Natesh's conception of his wife ("dressed as "he" wanted") as an obedient showpiece.

It would be wrong to assume, because of the above analysis, that Waiting for the Mahatma consists largely of such splendidly funny scenes. Besides Malgudi's reception given to Gandhi, there are only two or three other scenes which are in a similar comic vein. One is the occasion when Sriram pickets a village shop

because the proprietor sells English biscuits, and the other is the near-cremation of Sriram's Granny, who had been falsely pronounced dead. In the former instance comedy is provided by Sriram's idealistic solemnity ("I am only fighting the evil in you; it is a non-violent fight" (p.110), he tells the agitated shop-keeper); by the gathering crowd taking advantage of the situation to denounce shopmen ('"They have become very avaricious," a sentiment with which most of the people were in agreement' (p.111)); and by the nervous discomforture of the portly shopkeeper who tries to retain one customer at least by arguing that it was not an auspicious day for returning a customer's money.

The scene at the funeral pyre is a farcical Indian version of one of the stock comic situations in literature—a mistake in the matter of death of the kind which is the plot basis, for example, of The Playboy of the Western World. Just as Synge exposes sentimental and hypocritical aspects of Irish character, so Narayan satirises the avarice and pride of the priestly and medical classes. When Sriram's Granny is about to be set alight, the mourners are amazed to notice her big toe wagging. She is dragged out just in time much to the consternation of the priest who, seeing himself losing his fees, protests "You can't do that" (p.170), and also to the doctor who is guilty of the worst blunder his profession is capable of.

The doctor brooded. In his experience this was the first situation of the kind. Previously he had known only one-way traffic. (p.172)

Another element of the comic tradition which Narayan makes use of in Waiting for the Mahatma is to be seen in the frustrations of romantic love which Sriram experiences in his courting of Gandhi's adopted god-child, Bharati. Sriram is obviously intended to give the novel unity, both comic and narrative. At the beginning of the story Sriram is an orphaned young man of means, an egotistic, naive, vain twenty-year-old whose innocence is his main saving grace. 'He fancied himself the center of attraction if any woman happened to look in his direction' (p.25). He is the traditional romantic lover cast in an amusing role. He falls in love with Bharati at first sight and becomes a Gandhi disciple solely (at first) that he may pursue his amatory suit. While listening to Gandhi preaching a love-thy-enemy-the-British kind of Ahimsa, Sriram interprets the Mahatma's doctrine of love purely in personal terms. In his thoughts Sriram assures the Mahatma that because of his love for Bharati his "heart is pure and without bitterness" (p.28). But when he meets the Mahatma he isby no means so self-assured:

His legs felt weak and seemed to intertwine; he seemed to be walking like a drunkard, a particularly dangerous impression to create in the Mahatma who was out to persuade even the scavengers to give up drinking. (p.59)

This indicates the self-conscious comic stuff of which Sriram is made.

However, Narayan is not able to make him live up significantly to his comic or human promise. Sriram's separation from Bharati, his career as a Quit India sign-writer, disillusioned idealist, terrorist and political prisoner—the bulk of the narrative in fact—lacks the contagious interest which we find in most of the other novels. There are a few amusing flashes of Sriram in his role of frustrated romantic, as well as of his growth towards maturity. In jail, for instance:

> He dwelt on reminiscences of Monte Cristo's escapades; it was all very interesting and kept his mind busy planning. His admiration for the old prisoners became genuine; his sympathies were really widening. (p.195)

But Sriram is neither colourful nor mature enough to sustain either a comic chain of events, as does Margayya, or a serious encounter with life, as does Krishnan. It is possible that the main reason why Waiting for the Mahatma is not as successful, for instance, as The Financial Expert, The Guide and The Man-eater of Malgudi is that Narayan was imaginatively restricted by the use of Gandhi as a main character. On the one hand, while the great appeal of Gandhi the man for Narayan the novelist was the Mahatma's humanity and comic grace, Narayan could not take the literary liberties with such

a historically-objectified figure that he needed to if he were to make out of Gandhi's life the kind of richly comic material from which Margayya, Raju and Nataraj were so delightfully and imaginatively created. But as reverence humanised with humour, Waiting for the Mahatma is not an unfitting tribute to a great man.

When Narayan's portrayal of a real-life authentic Mahatma in Waiting for the Mahatma is compared with his portrayal of a fictional 'reluctant holy man' in The Guide, the comic difference between the two novels is immediately discernible. What is less obvious is that we have also moved into the sphere of comedy of archetypes. The Guide is based on a superb comic idea: the incredible progress of a rogue into saintly redeemer. But although the story is unlikely, the comedy is human, authentic and relevant because it is conceived in terms of an ironic conjunction of two fundamental Hindu archetypes: the motive of renunciation and the concept of the fourth ashrama in which 'stage' the mendicant achieves true holiness. Before analysing the comedy of The Guide from this point of view, however, it is important to remember that comedy of manners in the Narayan vein is an important aspect of his comic style and is therefore not confined to an isolated novel or story. Just as social background (Malgudi) is an essential part of Narayan's fiction, so comic exposures of exaggerated or eccentric 'manners' are inevitably part of the class, or group-behaviour, structure of that

background.

The novels under discussion in the present chapter teem with examples. From The Financial Expert: Margayya's tycoon aspiration, professional pride and notions of commercial dignity; his loss of paternal authority when the crowd reprimands him for punishing Balu; the business principles of never confessing ignorance and always having the last word; the social complexity of inter-familial strife.

From The Guide: Raju the child's antagonism to education; Raju the swami's reverence for learning; Railway Raju's psychological tactics as a guide, keeping a potential customer under scrutiny until he knows how much the client is likely to pay; Rosie's temperamental fervour as an artiste and the stone-like dispassionate scholarship of Marco; Raju the impressario's passion for status symbols, including a Gurkha house-guard with a dagger at his waist. Velan's simple-minded discipular trust in Raju; the American TV producer who radiates gregarious efficiency.

From the Man-eater of Malgudi: the 'adjournment lawyer' so-called 'for his ability to prolong a case beyond the wildest dream of a litigant' (p.10); the heavy cynicism and business toughness with which Nataraj transacts a deal with a waste-paper buyer; Sastri's habit of referring most problems to an apposite Sanscrit verse; Nataraj's guilty unholy lustful thoughts concerning Rangi, the Temple prostitute; the Mempi

schoolmaster who keeps on interrupting a public meeting with his reminiscences.

From The Sweet-Vendor: the cultural tragi-comedy of Mali bringing home a mistress, Grace, who is half-Korean and half-American; Mali's acquisition of Western habits; the comedy of misunderstanding which results, for example, from Mali addressing Grace as "Honey"—'Jagan wondered whether he should address her as Honey or Grace' (p.65); the ingenious dishonesty with which Jagan combines Gandhian idealistic principles with materialistic business practice; the social faux pas to which Jagan as a potential bridegroom had been liable—'his action went into the repertory of family jokes. Whenever his maternal uncles or others...gathered...looking for scapegoats for their gossip, invariably Jagan supplied the text' (p.158); the semi-comic problems involved in acquiring a fertility blessing. And so on.

From the above examples it can be appreciated that Narayan is very much in the comedy of manners tradition in that he exploits, for humorous purposes, social conventions and moral codes, religious custom and ritual, and communal attitudes. Thus Rosie and Rangi epitomise the woman who insults Hindu proprieties, while various professional types (priests, lawyers, teachers, businessmen, doctors etc.) cloak their materialism and selfishness in enveloping gestures of religious

respectability. As in the traditional comedy of manners, many of Narayan's minor characterisations are exaggerated types delineated on a class or caste basis.

On the other hand Narayan's central characters, for the most part, fit into a different comic pattern: a series of involvements and fluctuating fortunes which, incongruously or ironically, conform to an archetypal destiny. This comic notion is beautifully sustained in The Guide, partly because of the dual narrative structure. In order to appreciate how this is so, a brief recapitulation of the main structural facts is necessary.

The Guide opens in the third person, with Raju taking refuge in the neglected village temple and welcoming the 'intrusion' of the deferential but curious Velan. Then, for the first six chapters the point of view alternates between third and first person narration. In the interspersed passages of first-person narrative, we learn the reason for Raju's voluntary exile and desire to avoid people (he has just been released from jail and the association with Rosie that led to his sentence is a painful memory); also Raju recalls aspects of his past and thereby provides background information about himself—his energetic childhood, how he progressed from shopkeeper to tourist guide, etc. Narayan distorts the time-scheme, a little uncomfortably, by explaining that parts of these first-person reminiscences have been extracted from the later autobiographical sequence related at a single sitting

(chapters 7 to 10):

My troubles would not have started (Raju said at a later stage in the course of narrating his life-story to this man who was called Velan) but for Rosie. (p.9)

Narayan uses the third person to describe and develop the classic misunderstanding whereby Velan mistakes Raju for a sadhu. Raju enjoys playing the assigned role partly for convenience, but also because his vibrant adaptable personality relishes the opportunity to display his theatrical talents. He enjoys the prestige, glamour and admiration attaching to his image to the point where he is seduced by hiw own imposture (one of the many universal traits which Narayan has crystallised with comic expertise). At this point, the law of misunderstanding which had operated, it seemed, solely to serve Raju's egoism, now plays a nasty ironic trick on him and he becomes the victim of his own enormous 'creation'. When feuding breaks out in the village Raju, smartly confident of his influence over the locals, threatens to fast until the fighting stops; however, Raju's half-witted messenger miscontrues this grand gesture, informing the villagers that the fast was intended to end the severe drought which was currently ruining them. This brings the story to the end of chapter 6, with Raju determined to escape his awful predicament by revealing to Velan that he is a fraud. To this end he relates his life story

and the narration of it (in the first person) comprises chapters 7 to 10 inclusive. The last chapter (11), narrated in the third person, portrays Raju's heroic moral transformation with remarkable deftness and assurance (heroism, it should be noted, in the comic rather than tragic spirit and equally difficult to bring off). Raju is dumbfounded, humbled but also inspired to find that his devout listener regards the autobiographical account as complete proof of the fraudulent Swami's humility and godliness. A Great Soul is born. Raju applies himself to the art of fasting with all the passionate concentration that formerly he devoted to Rosie's artistic career. He sincerely lives up to his fated role, disinterestedly dedicating himself to the villagers' salvation and giving his life in the attempt. In this audacious way (Graham Greene rightly advised that Raju should die at the end) Narayan brings off an artistic transformation of ironies, from an irony of comic contradiction to one of achieved moral integrity.

Of Narayan's use of this dual point of view in The Guide, Nirmal Mukerji comments:

The consistently braided time-scheme...contributes towards a better and deeper understanding of the hero who is both a swindler and a holy man. By alternating the two time-schemes at sharp intervals, Narayan has been able to bring in focus those aspects of Raju's character which are essential for the analysis of his inner confusion....we see Raju as he wishes to be seen.

Within these sections of Raju's confessions are embroidered the strands of the narrative which are related by the omniscient author. Here we have the life of Raju as a holy man. The angle is different. So is the point of view. The result is that we get a closer view of what a character like Raju can be and is. The difference between the Raju of reality and the Raju of appearance lies at the core of the three-dimensional quality of his character.[53]

In A Human Idiom William Walsh observes:

The complex association of sincerity and self-deception is indeed the organising theme of The Guide: how these conditions grow out of one another, how they co-exist, disagree, supplant and in the long run re-attract one another. To put it like this is probably to be unduly —perhaps savagely—abstract about a novel remarkable for the way in which the structural conception is thoroughly incorporated into the tissue of the characters and the play of events. One cannot attempt, without damage to both, to extricate the idea from the detail; and yet one's awareness at any place in the novel is intimately affected by the presence...of this controlling conception. (p.137)

Although Walsh rightly does not want to wrench apart content and form, or theme from detail, his comment complements Mukerji's. Both statements taken together usefully point to the artistic correlation in the novel between the theme pertaining to the division in Raju's character and the division of point of view. This

53 "Some Aspects of the Technique of R.K. Narayan's The Guide", The Western Humanities Review, Vol.XV 1961, pp.372-3.

correlation is in part ironic (Raju's transformation into sainthood encloses the story of his degeneration) and helps to sustain from the first page to the last Narayan's malty combination of comedy and irony. The reader is encouraged to share both the author's detachment and Raju's conviviality, as a result of the juxtaposition of the two developments in Raju's character; developments from imposter to innocent and innocent to imposter, with the jail episode the transition link between the two. At a simple level of contrast, the dual narration distinguishes between the miscreant who breaks the Hindu code, as well as the law, and the sanyasi who epitomises the highest spiritual and social aspirations; between the rake and adulterer who dishonours his mother and casts her out and the chaste lover of his fellow man; between base passion and pure piety.

The novel's structural design, however, is not as arbitrary or mechanical as this 'simple level of contrast' may suggest. As rogue Raju is not unforgivably immoral, as holy man he is not spiritually unique. In both roles Raju is the same vivacious appealing personality. Though he becomes a socialite poseur and a thoughtless obsessed materialist, he remains human and interesting as an enthusiast and man of passion. Though he treats his mother indelicately, his capacity to devote himself to the needs of others is exceptional. 'It was in his nature to

get involved in other people's interests and activities' (p.8), the novelist says. 'It is Raju's fate', comments William Walsh, 'to be the product of other people's convictions' (A Human Idiom, p.139). His frailties and weaknesses are not morally exceptional and are innocent in the sense that they are an expression of an intense love of life; 'the panorama of life enchanted me' (p.13), Raju comments recalling his childhood. In this respect part of the child in Raju never grew up. His holy man act reflects an instinctive love of games and make-believe, while he dedicates himself to the fast with the innocence (spiritual if you like) of a child. And this child-like quality is one of the main reasons why author and reader find Raju an enchanting character.

Raju's moral failings, then, can be contemplated sympathetically, essentially because they are seen in a comic or warmly ironic light. The opportunist side to Raju's character has its origins in boyhood versatility. Thus, when he looked after his father's shop and took four peppermints out of the jar instead of the three the customer asked for, he 'swallowed the fourth in order to minimize complications' (p.11). As an opportunist he not only takes advantage of opportunities but also creates them. As a guide and later the manager-organiser of Rosie's dance-tours Raju displays an extraordinary organisational ability, especially in dealing with people (clients, celebrity hunters, musicians etc.) with deft diplomacy and psycho-

logical know-how. His vanity, duplicity, possessiveness, materialistic obsessions—all of which contribute to his downfall—are in fact the failings of a dynamic personality.

This ethical ambiguity in Raju's character was apparent from the first. Thus for Raju the tourist guide telling untruths is an art, a professional skill, as well as a function of personality and mood:

> ...the age I ascribed to any particular place depended upon my mood at that hour and the type of person I was escorting. If he was of the academic type I was careful to avoid all mention of facts and figures and to confine myself to general descriptions, letting the man himself do the talking. You may be sure he enjoyed the opportunity. On the other hand, if an innocent man happened to be at hand, I let myself go freely. I pointed out to him something as the greatest, the highest, the only one in the world. I gave statistics out of my head. I mentioned a relic as belonging to the thirteenth century before Christ or the thirteenth century after Christ, according to the mood of the hour. If I felt fatigued or bored with the person I was conducting, I sometimes knocked the whole glamour out by saying, "Must be something built within the last twenty years and allowed to go to rack and ruin. There are scores of such spots all over the place." But it was years before I could arrived at that stage of confidence and nonchalance. (pp.51-2)

Raju's relationship with Rosie (career is a more accurate description) progresses through two quite feasible phases: romantic and materialistic. The former phase involves a flamboyant disregard for worldly

concerns (his guide business deteriorates and he loses his railway shop), while the latter stage involves Raju's obsession with success and disastrous disregard for Rosie's personal feelings. As Rosie's lover and admirer he is at first possessed by an 'all-absorbing romanticism' (p.155); when he watches her dance his mind is elevated and free from carnal thoughts. But as her promoter it is the fanciful inventive con-man in Raju who comes to the fore. He establishes her professional identity as 'Nalini', 'a name which could have significance, poetry, and universality, and yet was short and easily remembered' (pp.156-7). In publicising Rosie's artistic genius, he gives vehement lectures on the survival of art in India ('Heaven knew where I had found all this eloquence' (p.157), he says in an aside). With Rosie's sensational success, Raju's egoism knew no bounds:

When I watched her in a large hall with a thousand eyes focused on her, I had no doubt that people were telling themselves and each other, "There he is, the man but for whom—" and I imagined all this adulation lapping around my ears like wavelets. In every show I took, as a matter of right, the middle sofa in the first row. I gave it out that...unless I sat there Nalini would be unable to perform. She needed my inspiring presence. I shook my head discreetly...I liked the way the president of the occasion sat next to me, and leaned over to say something to me....I shook my head, laughed with restraint, and said something in reply; leaving the watching audience at our back to guess the import of our exchanges, although actually it was never anything more than, "The hall seems to have filled—" (pp.162-3)

We can distinguish here, as in Raju's narrative as a whole, his voice or tone from that of the author. Whereas the honesty of Raju's self-revelation carries with it the flamboyance of nostalgia, Narayan puts a comic stamp on the confessional tone, particularly in the deflating juxtaposition of Raju's exhibitionism, self-importance etc. and the banal reality of what the so-called great personages have to say. The above passage also illustrates the incredible conceit which marks the moral decline of Raju's involvement with Rosie.

The greater Rosie's success, the more militant and aggressive Raju's conceit becomes. As his obsession with status and wealth grows, he becomes increasingly selfish and possessive in his attitudes to people. He commits the cardinal Hindu mistake of falling into the trap of Maya; of being imprisoned by his passion for attachments and by the base but illusory satisfactions of self. His possessiveness centres on Rosie, of whom he is irrationally jealous:

> I resented anyone wanting to make a direct approach to her. She was my property. The idea was beginning to take root in my mind....I liked her to be happy—but only in my company. (pp.168-9)

Raju, of course, loses all sense of moral proportion and eventually goes to jail for forging Rosie's signature in a vain attempt to keep Marco out of her life. Deception of self and others, then, is the basis of Raju's downfall.

This brings us to the ambiguity of Raju's acquired sainthood. The same gregarious and spontaneous capacity for involvement, which resulted in Raju's abortive affair with Rosie, causes him to become involved in Velan's affairs and to conform to Velan's version of him. It is noticeable that, despite his remorseful protestations, Raju is still not cured of the old habits of personality which made him susceptible to the enticements of Maya. Just as he had delighted in the 'world of showmanship' (p.164) he could create around Rosie, so he boasts that while in jail 'I was the master of the show' and 'visited all departments of the prison as a sort of benevolent supervisor' (p.202). Moreover, it is this flair and passion for showmanship that most attracts him to the sanyasi role which he encourages Velan to thrust upon him. Thus Raju feels himself growing wings as he makes grand mystical pronouncements. 'He felt he was attaining the stature of a saint' (p.15) and 'could not open his lips without provoking admiration' (p.27). He organises evening teaching sessions at the temple and—susceptible as ever to self-deception—'was surprised at the amount of wisdom welling from the depths of his being' (p.41).

Narayan etches this curve of exultant egoism along a few plotted and telling phrases in which the tongue-in-cheek language is appropriate to the comic grandeur of Raju's apostleship: the language is seen to be merely <u>appearing</u> to credit Raju with the seriousness with which he credits himself. This is mock-heroic in a plain style:

He was hypnotized by his own voice...No one was more impressed with the grandeur of the whole thing than Raju himself. (p.42)

The essence of sainthood seemed to lie in one's ability to utter mystifying statements. (p.46)

...his prestige had grown beyond his wildest dreams. His life had lost its personal limitations...(p.47)

His eyes shone with softness and compassion, the light of wisdom emanated from them. (p.79)

The psychological pattern illustrates the familiar 'pride before fall' theme.

Believing his one-day fast to have stopped the fighting in the village, Raju looks forward to the food his disciples would bring him. On their arrival he 'entered into a semiphilosophical discourse on a set of rambling themes, starting with the eating of good food and going on to absolute trust in God's goodness' (p.93). Thus Raju's shattering deflation—the revelation that the villagers believe him to be fasting until the rains come—comes with comic dramatic appropriateness when his egoism is at its height. The misunderstanding which precedes this revelation is comically commensurate with the flash of recognition which follows it:

He got down from his pedestal—that was the first step to take. That seat had acquired a glamour, and as long as he occupied it people would not listen to him as to an ordinary mortal. He now saw the enormity of his own creation. He had created a giant with his puny self, a throne of authority with that slab of stone. He left his seat abruptly, as if he had been stung by a wasp, and approached Velan. His tone hushed

[sic] with real humility and fear; his manner was earnest. Velan sat still as if he were a petrified sentry. (p.96)

That last sentence aptly suggests Raju's moral imprisonment, and his obligations to his pose.

This, then, is the situation which introduces Raju's main narrative, and it anticipates the archetypal patterns of pride and fall, of involvement, attachment, egocentricity and self-deception, which we will find to be the basis of Raju's character and experiences. Both the predicament and the subsequent confession, however, bring about a real development in Raju's character. Despite the pleasure Raju derives from recounting his sinful playboy past, it is evident from the clear-sighted self-criticisms which punctuate the confession that he has been shocked into a maturer level of awareness. In describing himself when he was on the crest of the wave of success, he adopts a moralising tone that conveys a realistic assessment of arrogance and pride:

Don't be misled by my present show of humility; at the time there was no limit to my self-congratulation. (p.162)
I felt vastly superior...(p.167)

Concerning his reprehensible attempts to hide Marco's communications from Rosie, he comments:

I've come to the conclusion that nothing in the world can be hidden or suppressed. All such attempts are like holding an umbrella to conceal the sun. (p.177)

There is no suggestion here that Raju has suddenly and unbelievably become a different person; Narayan's sense of character and appreciation of the subtleties of irony are too keen to let that happen. No doubt the self-critical asides are also partly for Velan's benefit, a function of Raju's awareness that if he is to escape the fatal fast his disciple must be convinced that he cannot possibly be a great soul.

Nevertheless, when Raju concludes his story and finds that Velan is a more confirmed disciple than ever, the fact remains that he does not run away. Instead, aware that the 'whole countryside was now in a happy ferment, because a great soul had agreed to go through the trial', he feels a moral duty not to insult the villagers' faith in him; and so he becomes absorbed into the communal archetype, and conforms to Velan's

account of what the Saviour was expected to do—stand in knee-deep water, look to the skies, and utter the prayer lines for two weeks, completely fasting during the period—and lo, the rains would come down, provided the man who performed it was a pure soul, was a great soul. (p.95)

This is a transforming experience. Raju takes his first important steps to the ultimate goal of Hinduism by beginning to conquer self and act disinterestedly:

> For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort, for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application, outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested. (p.213)

However, he is still Raju and the author is as honest as ever with himself and his characters, with life and the reader. It is implied (by tone of voice as much as anything else) that Raju derives some egoistic pleasure from saintly disinterestedness. This is his finest hour of showmanship: he is the centre of a nation-long and world-wide attraction and will be seen (interviewed, devout, dying) on American television; when the TV interviewer asks him if he has always been a Yogi, he answers "Yes, more or less" (p.219); and he defies the Government's 'Top Priority' request that he save his life by halting the fast. Complementing Raju's grand gestures are Narayan's comic and satirical observations concerning the sensationalistic and sight-seeing appetites of the mass-media and the tourist hordes. The meaning of Raju's sacrifice is almost obliterated by the crowd's parasitic curiosity and carnival mood, and Narayan implies that the public at large would be quite unable to distinguish a bogus from a genuine swami. These factors are part of the novel's ironic

design. Raju the great exploiter has created a great situation for exploiters of all kinds: business men, vendors, journalists, TV producers, government propaganda bureaus etc. Very noticeably, the comic viewpoint is both intensified and mellowed, but not inverted. Film-shows, shops, merry-go-rounds, loudspeaker music and gambling booths incongruously surround the temple:

> Men, women, and children crowded in to watch the film-shows, which were all about mosquitoes, malaria, plague, and tuberculosis, and B.C.G. vaccination. When a huge close-up of a mosquito was shown as the cause of the malaria, a peasant was overheard saying, "Such huge mosquitoes! No wonder the people get malaria in those countries. Our own mosquitoes are so tiny that they are harmless," which depressed the lecturer on malaria so much that he remained silent for ten minutes. (p.215)

As the novel ends with Raju sinking to the ~~ji~~ ground convinced that "it's raining in the hills" (p.221), the irony is complete, the comedy is consecrated, the archetype is renewed and the character is fulfilled. The Guide, therefore, quite superbly indicates how, in Narayan's best work, his comedy involves a fully rounded, psychologically credible central character and derives its virility and meaning from an archetypal situation. Nor does Narayan's comic vision reduce life to a categorical or artificial perspective. Hence the illuminating ambiguity of the climax which, on the one hand, assures us that faith is a vital force, that moral

strength gives man nobility, that Raju has achieved real stature; but which, on the other hand, teasingly queries whether or not Raju's last conviction was not his greatest self-deception of all.

Nevertheless, Raju's conversion to sainthood is not as implausible as it might at first seem. His character evolution is credible. As a man of intensity, he progresses from one line of fanatic enthusiasm to another. His regrets concerning his past with Rosie are natural, as is his realisation that his ego became so inflated as to dislocate his sense of reality. Equally natural is his incorrigibility—his hearty imitation of a sanyasi. His motives are impure but zestful, but he does at last accept responsibility for them. That he attains the status of great soul because of a misunderstanding, and as a result of motives which in the first place were quite irreverent, is the central irony of the denouement. But the transformation could not have been achieved without Raju's strong personality and good qualities: his capacity to accept a situation with a willing heart, his mercurial empathetic imagination, and his dedication to life. The degree to which Raju became a great soul and achieved spiritual insight remains a teasing ambiguity, justifiably, because of Narayan's awareness of fraudulence in sincerity and sincerity in fraudulence. The ending of The Guide provides evidence of Narayan's flexible sensitivity—as does Jagan's detachment from the world at the end of The Sweet-Vendor, and concerning which William Walsh aptly remarks:

His decision, which is of course in the Classical Indian line...is...charmingly freckled with an appealing human flaw...He doesn't neglect to take his cheque book with him.[54]

It is ultimately on the 'classical Indian line' or archetype that The Guide, and Narayan's comic art, rest, and in the light of which the novel must be interpreted and evaluated. Both William Walsh and C.D. Narasimhaiah establish this convincingly. In A Human Idiom, Walsh points to Narayan's themes of spiritual aspiration and acceptance of life, both of which are central to The Guide as we have seen; points out that Raju's character develops realistically, 'displaying that convincing combination of logic and absurdity we are familiar with in our own lives' (p.142); and comments appropriately that:

For Narayan, then, the very conditions of human growth are individual discrepancy and communal collaboration. It is this double insight which the career of Raju embodies and justifies. At its conclusion the confidence man has become the man deserving of confidence.... there is some measure...of endorsement by reality, in Raju's transformation. It has the approval of the gods, of life. (pp.147-8)

Similarly Narasimhaiah, in his article "R.K. Narayan's 'The Guide'", remarks on the archetypal authenticity of Raju's 'redemption':

54 "The Spiritual and the Practical" (a review of The Sweet-Vendor), The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, July 1968 no.5, p.121.

...redemption came when he started going out of himself caring for others and living for others and above all ceasing to live a life of mere appearances but a truly integrated life. For this, nourishment came from the simple folk, the traditional stories of good men his mother had narrated and his old, ingrained habit of rising to any occasion, living up to his reputation.... in India...the criterion of greatness is still the stature of the spirit. And the ending is smooth and inevitable. India's undying faith in God and goodness, holymen and miracles is here rendered quite credible by the novelist's art even to the sceptical and questioning eye.

...Raju is India itself—its astonishing power, and deep inner reserves to revitalise itself and work its way to fulfilment. ...Raju fell a prey to illusion ...But he ends up caring for reality... (pp.84-5)

The Guide, then, is a complex effectuation of that aspect of Narayan's art which can be defined usefully as 'comedy of archetypes' and which gives his work a classical basis and objective coherence. The recognition of these elements in Narayan constitutes a critical approach which is also pertinent in the case of The Financial Expert, The Man-eater of Malgudi and The Sweet-Vendor. Reference to the artistic quality of The Financial Expert was made in some detail in an earlier chapter where the synthesis of life and imaginative sensibility was noted with regard to the following: the portrayal of Margayya and the real-life basis of his characterisation, the subtle psychological exploration of Margayya's relationship with his society and of the influence of the traditional environment upon him, the emotional and institutional complexities of the

family, and some social and historical incongruities of Indian life. What needs to be stressed here is that these elements are blended into a coherent structure by Narayan's comic and controlling sensibility, and that the comedy as such is itself unified by the archetypal framework of the story. This framework consists largely of the religious ascetic attitude to life, and the comedy, characterisation and story are conceived mainly and ironically in terms of Margayya's incongruous, incompatible but devotional application of the philosophy of religious asceticism to the materialistic, unholy business of making money.

As we have seen, Narayan used a different archetypal framework in The Man-eater of Malgudi, and the comedy in this novel emanates from more specific and complicated classical concepts than was the case in The Financial Expert. The underlying archetypal idea in The Man-eater, of course, is that of the irruption of the rakshasa into the everyday Hindu world and the overpowering of the demon's disrupting malevolence by divine fate. Edwin Gerow's compelling interpretation of The Man-eater of Malgudi[55] assembles most of the evidence of the story's archetypal pattern, of the background to the comic conflict between Vasu and Nataraj and to the labyrinthine involvements which Nataraj is magnetised into. Gerow comments:

55 "The Quintessential Narayan", Literature East and West, 10 No.s 1,2 Winter/Spring 1966, pp.1-18.

It is in the denouement that Narayan's notions of characterization and plot are brought most clearly into focus. The conflict between Nataraj and Vasu is, in its own terms, insoluble. Reviewers are in part correct in understanding it as a parable, Vasu and Nataraj as types. But the incompatibility of the two men is as much a function of ancient Indian ideas of reality: different levels of existence imply different aims, modalities, conditions of existence; the reconciliation of levels must come about as a transcendent act...It is not the "plans" of Nataraj that stop Vasu, for Narayan's point is partly that plans themselves and indeed the entire rationale of directed activity is disruptive, demonic, and ultimately futile, and partly that Nataraj embodies precisely that level of existence which is <u>not</u> action-oriented. Yet Nataraj does "succeed"...He sets in motion a fortuitous series of events centering around the festival...(pp.11-2)

Gerow points out the main structural significance of the festival (aside from plot): first, that as 'a symbolic reaffirmation of the community' (p.12) it stimulates the fundamentally devout Nataraj into performing heroic feats of organisation; and second, that 'the cosmic paradigm of the event' determines the climax as an occasion when human affairs and cosmic moral inevitability are in conjunction with the 'prodigious task' being 'accomplished by the lowest of God's creatures' (a mosquito) and the 'incongruity of this event' underscoring 'the Indian belief in the coherence of all reality' (p.13). However, it should be remembered that because the context of the story is as much mock-epic as epically derived, the action is as much one of muted hilarity as of moral seriousness.

In The Sweet-Vendor Jagan returned to the theme of family life which he had not examined with exacting concentration since The Dark Room, Grateful to Life and Death and (to a lesser extent) The Financial Expert. While evolving the familial plot in The Sweet-Vendor, Narayan seems deliberately to have held his two modes of comedy—of manners and archetypes—in balance. On the one hand, there are typical comedy of manners entanglements in the situation of the Indian-minded Jagan trying to cope with his Americanised son and mistress-in-law. The incongruities and misunderstandings that inevitably result are anticipated and epitomised in the gift which Mali and Grace bring Jagan from the States: a picnic hamper. Given Jagan's obsessions about food and natural medicine, and his fanatically medieval notions about eating, the hamper could not have been more appropriately inappropriate. On the other hand, the comedy of Jagan's domestic and family frustrations emerges into the deeper, archetypal implications of his personality development as he proceeds from the second asrama (of the householder) towards the third asrama (of the hermit). By the end of the novel he appreciates (properly in accordance with the archetype) that his affectionate concern for Mali was a selfish attachment: however it is the ironic twist which Narayan gives to this orthodox attitude which is dramatically important. For, as Mali tries to involve his father financially in the writing-machine enterprise etc., Jagan's selfish attachment turns out to be in-

creasingly troublesome. Therefore Jagan's renunciation of the world is not altogether disinterested or pure-minded; just as he takes his cheque book with him, so the third asrama provides him with a convenient escape from the trials of life with Grace and Mali.

Taken together, then, The Financial Expert, The Man-eater of Malgudi, and The Sweet-Vendor are archetypal variations on a comic theme. Of the main characters in these novels, Margayya is the most subtle, fertile creation. The development of his character in terms of the religious metaphor is ingenious. Indeed his guru status (in a materialistic sense, of course) is established in the opening paragraph which informs us that his name means literally 'one who showed the way' (p.1). His ritualistic respect for money is evident from the sacred awe in which his red account book is held by his clients, as well as himself, while the daily homecoming meeting with Balu (who revels in visions of miniature offerings) signifies Margayya's ritualistic observance of love. On the comic symbolic level, then, the rebellious action of his son in throwing the book down the drain of oblivion is a sacreligious act. To Margayya Money is the equivalent of the Brahmin's Truth as an index to reality and a basis of existence; when he tells his wife "Money alone is important in this world" it is as if he is articulating a divine revelation. Once he decided to pledge himself to the search for wealth, 'He became

like one possessed' (p.18)—like, in other words, a sanyasi utterly dedicated to God.

With delicate deliberation and mock-inflation, Narayan quickly establishes the ascetic-usurer parallel which is to be the mainstay of characterisation and comic tone in the novel. At the same time he carefully prepares the pride-before-fall theme by depicting Margayya's heretical hubristic vision of the power of money as a transfiguring enlightenment whereby he sees himself as an ordained Saviour:

...he was obsessed with thoughts of money. His mind rang with the words he had said to the villagers: "I'm only trying to help you get out of your money worries." He began to believe it himself. He viewed himself as a saviour of mankind...

His mind began to catalogue all the good things money had done as far as he could remember. He shuddered to think how people could ever do without it. If money was absent men came near being beasts. (p.22)

He marvels at the scavengers who will even raise money for the burial of a destitute corpse in order to make a profit for themselves:

It made Margayya reflective. People did anything for money. Money was men's greatest need, like air or food. People went to horrifying lengths for its sake, like collecting rent on a dead body: yet this didn't strike Margayya in his present mood as so horrible as something to be marvelled at. It left him admiring the power and dynamism of money, its capacity to make people do strange deeds. (p.23)

Dedicated to the acquisition of wealth, Margayya is portrayed with amusing allegory in terms of mystical initiation, and rightly so for there is indeed something spiritually intense about his passion for wealth. It follows automatically (though really thanks to the author's ingenious sense of humour) that Margayya consults a priest as to the possibility of his acquiring wealth through some appropriate ritual of propitiation and worship. The extraordinary exactitude involved in becoming a devotee of Lakshmi, and the lengths to which Margayya is prepared to go, heighten the comic effect. The difficulties included the procuring of a Sanscrit syllable carved on antelope hide, red lotus which was rare in the district, and ghee made of milk from a smoke-coloured cow, as well as forty days of penance, fasting and prayer. At the same time the superstitious awe with which Margayya genuinely regards the priest (at some point his imagination of disaster runs away with him to the extent that he envisages the priest kidnapping Balu in order to sacrifice him) provides a credible basis for Margayya's incredible faith and devotion. Moreover, the author remains critically detached from Margayya's infectious activities and is aware of the inverted or ironical implications of the archetypal parallels. For instance, whereas Margayya as a true ascetic ought to be seeking ego-extinction, the greater his enlightenment the more hubristic he in fact becomes:

...Margayya said: "A man with [sic] whom the Goddess of Wealth favours need not worry much. He can buy all the knowledge he requires. He can afford to buy all the gifts that Goddess Saraswathi holds in her palm."

The priest let out a quiet chuckle at Margayya's very reckless statement. Margayya asked: "Why do you laugh?" Already a note of authority was coming into his voice. The priest said: "Yes, this is what every man who attains wealth thinks. You are moving along the right line...." (pp.41-2)

And so it comes to pass that Margayya meets his guru and prophet: the pornographic sociologist Dr. Pal who enables Margayya to take his first big financial step as a publisher of Pal's excitingly illustrated Bed Life, the title of which was discreetly altered to Domestic Harmony. Presumably Pal is an avatar of Lakshmi (on the comic allegorical level), for he says "There are only two things that occupy men's minds....Money...and Sex" and "I'm only interested in Truth" (p.69). The progress Margayya makes as a spiritual materialist is as dramatic as it is earnest. He makes Balu pray to Saraswathi every morning—this is to sanctify his practical methods of buying knowledge and school passes for his son. His attitude to personal wealth is idealistic and ascetic: the only luxury he allows himself, reluctantly, is a new umbrella (his old one looked 'like a shot-down crow with broken wings' (p.119)); though he spoils his son, he makes no improvements to his house and refuses his wife a servant. In other words, he tries

to hide his miserly instincts behind sanctimonious rationalisations and financial piety.

Thus he becomes a true mystic of money. Just as the holy man meditates on Brahma and the miracle of God's universe, so when Margayya meditates (and it is true meditation, not idle dreaming) he marvels at the divinity of Interest:

> There was probably no other person in the whole country who had meditated so much on the question of interest. Margayya's mind was full of it. Night and day he sat and brooded over it. The more he thought of it the more it seemed to him the greatest wonder of creation. It combined in it the mystery of birth and multiplication. Otherwise how could you account for the fact that a hundred rupees in a savings bank became one hundred and twenty in course of time? It was something like the ripening of corn. Every rupee, Margayya felt, contained in it seed of another rupee and that seed in it another seed and so on and on to infinity. It was something like the firmament, endless starts [sic] and within each star an endless firmament and within each one further endless...It bordered on mystic perception. It gave him the feeling of being part of an infinite existence. (p.95)

Instead of such meditations inducing humility however, they are fuel for pride:

> "I don't want people to say that Balu enjoys all the money earned through Domestic Harmony...." He felt very heroic when he said that. He seemed to swell with his goodness, nobility and importance... (p.96)

The thoroughness with which Narayan develops such instances of comic paradox in The Financial Expert is remarkable. The discrepancy between Balu's miserable failings and vegetable mentality and his father's grandiose visions and excuses is one of the most sustained pathetic ironies in the novel. A further pervasive irony (implicit in the meditation on interest) is that Margayya and Indian asceticism can also be interpreted as metaphors with a universal relevance, suggesting for instance the western business tycoon and American capitalism respectively.

The grand climax of the novel coincides with Margayya's soaring to incredible heights of financial mysticism. Note the subtle comic efficiency with which Narayan exploits the archetypal parallelism. Margayya embodies the main characteristics of the englightened divinely-inspired sanyasi. First as mystic:

> He could not yet say what the scheme would be, but he sensed its presence, being a financial mystic. (p.102)
> The first instalment was the real wealth—whose possibilities of multiplication seemed to stretch to infinity ....You could really not see the end of it—it was part of the mystic feeling that money engendered in Margayya ... (pp.149-50)

Second as scholar, well versed in the Sanscrit of economics and having an orderly intellect capable of making practical distinctions:

A rich man, according to his view, was just one caste below the man of wealth. Riches any hard-working fool could attain by some watchfulness, while acquiring wealth was an extraordinary specialized job. It came to persons who had on them the grace of the Goddess fully and who could use their wits....his mind always ran on lines of scientific inquiry whenever money came in question. He differentiated with great subtlety between money riches, wealth, and fortune. It was most important people should not mistake one for the other. (p.110)

Third as a benevolent, practical, curative, redemptive, missionary:

...ignorant folk...do not know the worth of money... He pitied them. He would not be a banker to them, but a helper, a sort of money doctor who would help people to use their money properly with the respect due to it. He would educate society anew in all these matters. (p.101)

Fourth as a money priest conscious of ritual, he cultivates an 'air of sanctity', (p.159) has two bank account numbers, and concludes his business at the bank 'without standing at the little window' (p.101). Fifth he is constantly devout, believing that to accumulate money is a sacred duty. And sixth, as a money Saviour and "Wizard" (p.160), he exercises his divine power by making such money miracles as offering 20% interest.

Considered objectively, therefore, Margayya's sins of pride and self-idolatory are colossal, and such majestic egoism is the stuff of comedy as well as tragedy. It is appropriate that Margayya's fall is

caused by the former avatar-prophet, Dr. Pal, who discredits Margayya with the result that the mass panic of Margayya's clients retrieving their deposits makes him bankrupt. Two points about the anti-climactic conclusion to the novel are worth noting: the first that this is comedy with a valid moral; the second that the occasion of Margayya's ruin reveals him in a truly human light. The moral is implicit and many sided: the destructive effects of materialistic obsessions, arrogance, conceit etc. Margayya's attempts to bribe the astrologer are indicative of the degree to which he will go in defying the gods! It is also significant that with the widening alienation from his son (because of Balu's running away from home and, later, his nefarious escapades with Pal), and the more Margayya is deprived of his son's affection, the more exclusively he devotes himself to the pursuit of the ultimate fortune. But when Margayya throws caution to the wind and lets his natural human impulse get the better of him, he is more of a human person. Such is the case when his moral outrage at Pal's immoral influence over Balu and at Balu's maltreatment of his devoted wife, and the blows that Margayya rains on Pal's head, become in effect Margayya's agents of redemption, his beating himself down to size. Once more he will be a mere mortal low-caste moneylender, making a modest living under the banyan tree, and this time connecting his reservoir of affection

to his grandson. After all the turmoil in the Heavens, day is still day and night night. Such comedy of archetypes is inherent in nature, in life. And one admires the structural integrity with which Narayan's device of parallelism is superbly and comically engineered.

One of the major themes implicit in Narayan's archetypal comedies is the precarious union of idealism and human imperfections. Most of the philosophies of life which are incorporated into his characterisations have their origins in the Indian cultural tradition which is, of course, renowned for its idealistic temper. As we have seen, Margayya attempted, not only to turn a materialistic way of life into an idealistic philosophy, but also to do so incongruously in terms of the pure Indian tradition which owes its special character to its anti-materialistic values. Like the gurus and saints and heroes of ancient times, Narayan realises that important among the human flaws which make idealism so difficult to practise are egoism, pride, arrogance, human attachments, as well as many of the enjoyable things in life. This recognition underlies his creation of characters like Sampath, Raju, Margayya, Vasu, Nataraj and Jagan. But it is not recognition in a grimly ascetic or puritanical sense; it is the recognition of unjudging detachment and humane understanding—of comic or ironic awareness of the discrepancy between idealist pronouncement and actual feeling or deed.

In a sense the cosmic drama of the conflict between idealism and human frailty underlies the central conception of The Man-eater of Malgudi where Narayan reproduces the conflict as delightful parody. On one level, ironically, the demonic materialistic violent Vasu (with his economics degree and scientific philosophy of life) is the idealist and the orthodox devout Nataraj is the ordinary mortal handicapped by rather blameless but yet real weaknesses. Against Vasu's Hitleristic ideal of dictatorship, based upon a rigidly rational organisation of life, Nataraj may seem quite ineffectual, especially when we remember the ease with which Vasu plagues him and the printer's complete impotence as a would-be destroyer of human monsters. Nevertheless, it is Nataraj who really has the life and Vasu the death (the taxidermist of course lives in a world of death and his pleasures, despite the enormity of his appetites and physical strength, are only mechanically or ghoulishly enjoyed). Moreover, Nataraj possesses that kind of pertinacious courage which is the spunk of endurance. When confronted by Vasu he seems a helpless even willing victim, yet he fronts up to the Man-eater if his sense of personal dignity is offended. Thus the relationship between the two is determined as much by the mixture of repulsion and attraction Nataraj feels towards Vasu as by Vasu's domineering demeanour. Nataraj 'enjoys the thrill of provoking him':

> Familiarity was making me rash and headstrong. I enjoyed taunting him....He might pulverize granite, smash his guru with a slicing stroke, but where printing work was concerned I was not going to be pushed. (p.19)

Nataraj admits to feeling pride in having such a perfect enemy and also because Vasu rouses in him pugnacity as well as resignation.

Interpreted as a conflict between brutish intellect and faith,[56] the skirmishes between the man-eater and the printer can be seen on different levels again as the opposition between philosophies of violence and non-violence and between soul-destroying modernism and idealistic orthodoxy. Thus, while Vasu exemplifies perverted idealism, arrogance and evil, Nataraj stands for conventional morality and ideals about the sanctity of life etc. but does so as an ordinary imperfect mortal whose limitations are more endearing than reprehensible. Prone to an imagination of disaster, on the one hand, and a flexible capacity to accept life, on the other, Nataraj is in the mould of the Narayan comic hero.

56 Cp. V. Panduranga Rao, "The Art of R.K. Narayan": 'In The Man-eater the theme is universal...it is the encounter between Faith and Reason, and Faith prevails' (p.36). 'Here the secret of Malgudi is Faith, which is represented in the novel by Kumar, the elephant (the traditional Indian symbol).... Eventually...the procession of God in the spring festival continues on its happy joyous march following Kumar, who carries the images of Radha and Krishna in their symbolic significance of the union of Atman with Paramatman, the self with the ultimate self' (p.39).

So is Jagan. His personality is a fallible and typical combination of high-minded aspirations and self-interested motives. His motto for life is 'Once a Satyagrahi, always a Satyagrahi' (p.138). As an idealist, he is a stylised Gandhian who leads a disciplined life and wears non-violent footwear, as well as being a fanatical exponent of Nature cure and natural diet. His devotion to principle is comically admirable: objecting to tooth brushes because they are made from pig's bristles, he declares "It's unthinkable that anyone should bite a pig's tail first thing in the morning" (p.26). Instead,

> Jagan had immense faith in the properties of margosa... He chewed its bitter leaves once a month, as it destroyed all bacteria in the system, and he felt elated when the breeze blew—the air passing through the margosa boughs became an anti-typhoid agent... (pp.26-7)

On the other hand, Jagan's inability to live up to some of his ideals is a matter of both comedy and pathos. As a business man he distinguishes between earned cash and undeclared 'free cash' which is not the concern of the taxation department in Jagan's view. While Jagan and the cousin are morally scandalised to learn that Mali and Grace are 'living in sin', they derive 'a vicarious pleasure from going into the details of lechery practised by their forefathers' (p.43).

When his wife was dying Jagan was as much preoccupied by his Nature-cure theories as his wife's condition.

Compared with other Narayan characters, then, Jagan is individualised but not all that exceptional. Narayan's comedy is inherent in the behaviour of his people—eccentric paradoxical Malgudians who are grateful to life and death despite the incredible complications affecting even the most elementary aspects of their existence. His subject is human nature and his contribution to the genre of the comic novel is in no small part the result of his ability to distinguish the artifice of comedy from the artificiality of humour unrelated to the realities of life. Accordingly, Narayan's comic vision illuminates a number of serious themes, including the notion that life is a subtle balance, harmony or fusion of such incompatible conditions as involvement and detachment, delusion and understanding, materialism and spirituality, vices and virtues, reason and emotion, and so on.

Narayan's art is in the true tradition and is perhaps most appropriately summed up in the following statement made by the author himself:

> ...the mood of comedy, the sensitivity to atmosphere, the probing of psychological factors, the crisis in the individual soul, and above all the detached observation, which constitute the stuff of fiction...[57]

Narayan's novels are 'the stuff of fiction'.

57 "The Fiction Writer in India", p.119.

V RAJA RAO: COMPANION OF PILGRIMAGE

Brahmin is he who knows Brahman. When confronted with this traditional proposition, which is one of the main premises underlying Raja Rao's novels, the non-Indian reader is humbly conscious of his critical limitations in attempting a discussion of this sophisticated Indian writer. Embedded in Raja Rao's writing are a mind and vision of life which are concretely intact yet bewilderingly elusive. It does not take long for the Western reader of The Serpent and the Rope (1960), or The Cat and Shakespeare (1965), to realise that Raja Rao is a far more complicated sensibility, searching for far more subtle insights, than such a reader's pre-conceived idea of the 'mystical Oriental' could envisage. To the non-Indian reader of these novels, then, the barriers to effective comprehension may well seem insuperable, particularly if the reader knows no Sanscrit, has only a second-hand acquaintance with India and the metaphysics and philosophy of Hinduism, has (compared

with Raja Rao) merely a superficial knowledge of medieval history, and can guess but doubtfully at the processes whereby Indian rhythms and textures of sensibility are rendered into English.

Yet the fact remains that Raja Rao has chosen to write in English and to address himself to an Occidental as well as Indian audience. Also, Raja Rao's earliest works—most of the stories in The Cow of the Barricades (1947) which were written prior to his first novel Kanthapura (1938)—present no special difficulties for the Western reader. The stories in The Cow of the Barricades are lyrical slices of Indian life. The subject-matter of this collection is authentically Indian and includes depictions of tender and sorrowful experiences of family life, the loneliness and frustrations of the widow in the joint family, the place of myth in the day-to-day Hindu world, the impact of Gandhi on Indian youth, the Independence struggle interpreted on the folk level of experience, the economic fanaticism of the bania class, the Machiavellianism of the professional match-maker, the ascetic's search for Truth and God, and the brutal reality of peasant life.

The Western reader of these stories is not expected to have to make any significant imaginative or cultural concessions in order to appreciate the experiences described. An example is "A Client", which is based on the French version of the story published in 1934.

This story is an account of the artful manner in which a professional match-maker, Nanjundayya, traps an unsuspecting student, Ramu, into accompanying him on a visit to a client. Only at the end of the story does Ramu realise that the visit is in fact an attempt to arrange a marriage between Ramu and the eleven or twelve year-old daughter of the other 'client'. Two observations are pertinent to the present discussion. Firstly, that Raja Rao lets the story speak for itself: for while it does penetrate the psychological and social pressures behind the arranged marriage system, this awareness is skilfully implied; there is no attempt on Raja Rao's part to provide explicit commentary for the foreign reader, and the telling of the story is convincing enough to make such comment unnecessary. Nor, secondly, need the ambiguity of the ending, in which Ramu asks himself 'Would he marry the girl?'[1] and thereby implies that he has possibly resigned himself to doing so, seem incomprehensible to the culturally-alien reader. This reveals in retrospect the suspect character of Ramu's earlier protestations that he was not yet ready to marry and that when he was he would choose for himself in the modern Western manner. The 'surprise' ending reminds us that, really, we ought not to be surprised at Ramu's apparent vulnerability and change of heart, especially when we remember the powerful centuries-old conditioning

1 The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories, Oxford University Press, 1947, p.141.

process which has perpetuated the tradition of the arranged marriage.

Of critical interest, so far as The Cow of the Barricades is concerned, is Raja Rao's ability to convey felt experience in an English which he has adventurously but unpretentiously moulded to suit his purpose. Thus the volume does contain significant intimations of Raja Rao's later style. The page-long second sentence of "The True Story of Kanakapala, Protector of Gold"—'the story of a serpent when he is a friend'[2]—suggests the meandering conversational loquaciousness of the itinerant story-teller as well as conveying the coiling labyrinthine rhythms of a snake. The sentence also points forward to the stylistic vitality of the narrator of Kanthapura, the discursive grandmother whose flow of memories Raja Rao renders in a flexible Indian-English which preserves many of the idiomatic gestures and conventions of the oral tradition of Indian story-telling.

Some of the short stories also contain various interior monologue and rhythmic effects which can be regarded retrospectively as a useful technical prelude to the stream-of-consciousness form of Kanthapura. Here is a modest example from "In Khandesh", first published in 1934:

2 ibid., p.54.

"Important business! Important business!" Dattopant said to himself. "What could that be? After all everything is over now. Thotababa's Tailend field was already auctioned by the government. Poor chap! One of the richest fellows in the village, his father was, in my father's time. Owned half the cotton-fields. They said gold was used to pave his floors. Thotababa! We told him, didn't we, not to get indebted to that Parsi? But he wanted money—money. If not how could he pay for his pilgrimages, marriages, mistresses?...And now...Ha! Ha! Poor Thotababa! Ambuderi is Bhattoji's mistress now. Where there's money, there are women. Juicy girl too, Ambuderi. But poor Thotababa! Grind the corn, brother, grind...." (pp.144-5)

The controlled chain of association and dramatic manipulation of tone of voice, evident in the above passage, are stylistic principles which Raja Rao was later to put more subtly into practice and which were to contribute significantly to the form of his three novels.

The folk voice is another tone which is characteristic of Raja Rao's narrative style, as is seen, for example, in the short story "The Cow of the Barricades" and in Kanthapura, both of which, significantly, were first published in the same year. The central character of "The Cow of the Barricades" is a folk heroine par excellence: Gauri, the cow, who symbolises Mother India in a number of important respects. Thus Gauri 'looked very sad, and somebody had even seen a tear, clear as a drop of the Ganges, run down her cheeks, for she was of compassion infinite and true' (p.177). In the story Gauri leads the crowd to the barricades where a group of militant workers confronts the 'red man's army'; by

her simple dignified presence she converts the workers to non-violence, and although she is shot by the red 'chief' her death heralds victory for the Independence movement. As a folk symbol, then, Gauri epitomises the holiness, nobility, truth, compassion and suffering of Mother India, the moral integrity of Gandhian principles, and the cause of freedom. She is also characteristically Indian as an embodiment of metaphysical principle—'she fell a vehicle of God among lowly men' (p.181)—and when peace and independence come she is deified in the minds of the people.

Appropriately, the narrative style of "The Cow of the Barricades" complements the folk theme. It is simple, assumes a live audience as it were, and achieves both a sense of rhetorical progression and, in the use of reiterated connectives, rhythmic variation. For example:

> And people were much affrighted, and they took the women and the children to the fields beyond and they cooked food beneath the trees and lived there—for the army of the Government was going to take the town and no woman or child would be spared. And doors were closed and clothes and vessels and jewels were hidden away, and only the workmen and the men ruled the city, and the Master was the head of them all, and they called him President. (p.178)

It is clear that in his short stories and Kanthapura Raja Rao was endeavouring to formulate a style which

was capable simultaneously of faithfully rendering social behaviour and expressing nuances of Indian sensibility.

Stylistically typical of the narrative voice in Kanthapura is the following passage which describes the arrest of a number of villagers, including Moorthy, the young excommunicated Brahmin and local Congress leader:

> And this time it was from the Brahmin quarter that the shouts came, and policemen rushed toward the Brahmins and beat them, and old Ramanna and Dore came forward and said, "We too are Gandhi's men, beat us as much as you like," and the policemen beat them till they were flat on the ground, mud in their mouths and mist in their eyes, and as the dawn was rising over the Kenchamma hill, faces could be seen, and men became silent and women became sobless, and with ropes round their arms seventeen men were marched through the streets to the Santur police station, by the Karwar road and round the Skeffington Coffee Estate and down the Tippur valley and up the Santur mound, and as the morning cattle were going out to the fields, and the women were adorning the thresholds for a Kartik morning, Brahmins and Pariahs and Potters and Weavers were marched into the police station—and seventeen men of Kanthapura were named and locked behind the bars. And the policemen twisted their arms and beat them on their knuckles, and spat into their mouths, and when they had slapped and banged and kicked, they let them out one by one, one by one they let them out, and they all marched back to Kanthapura, all but Moorthy. Him they put into a morning bus, and with one policeman on the right and one policeman on the left they carried him away to Karwar. We wept and we prayed, and we vowed and we fasted, and maybe the gods would hear our feeble voices. Who would hear us, if not they?
>
> The gods indeed did hear our feeble voices, for this advocate came and said, "I shall defend him," vakils and advocates and barristers came and said, "And we shall plead for him," and the students formed a defence committee and raised a huge meeting, and copper

and silver flowed into the collection plate, and merchants came and said, "And here we are when money is needed." And when Moorthy heard of all this, he said, "That is not for me. Between truth and me none shall come," and Advocate Ranganna went and saw him and said, "Moorthy! The Red-Man's judges, they are not your uncle's grandsons," and Moorthy simply said, "If truth is one, all men are one before it," and Ranganna said, "Judges are not for truth, but for law; and the English are not for the brown skin but for the white, and the Government is not with the people but with the police." And Moorthy listened to all this and said, "If that is so, it will have to change. Truth will have to change it. I shall speak that which truth prompteth, and truth needeth no defense," and Ranganna spoke this of corruption and that about prejudice, but "truth, truth, and truth" was all that Moorthy said, and old Ranganna, who had grown grey with law on his tongue, got so wild that he banged the prison door behind him and muttered to himself, "To the mire with you!"[3]

In order to isolate the basic elements which, in Kanthapura, contribute to the full flavour of Raja Rao's flowing prose, it is necessary, as above, to quote at least a moderately lengthy passage of continuous narrative. The quoted passage is sufficiently characteristic of the style of the novel to enable us to identity the main tones of the story-telling voice, and to realise that the constant concrete presence of this voice makes for a useful sense of intimacy both between the narrator and the characters and between author and reader. We can also discern that this method comfortably accommodates descriptive and dramatic modes, and that the

3 Kanthapura, New York, New Directions, 1967, pp.85-6. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

artistic success of the method—particularly in maintaining lively interest and preventing monotony—is largely dependent on a consistent use of techniques of modulation. Thus, in the above passage, for example, the transition from the description of an action to direct speech, and the simultaneity of the sense of movement and the sense of place, all presented in a single flexible sentence, are reinforced by such techniques of modulation as repetition and a rhythmic use of proper nouns and connectives; alliteration, assonance, balanced phrasing and strong verbs ('mud in their mouths and mist in their eyes', 'men became silent and women became sobless', 'We wept and we prayed, and we vowed and we fasted' etc.); the use of archaic speech forms ('prompteth', 'needeth') and colloquial aphorism which provides vernacular verisimilitude ('grown grey with law on his tongue'); etc. Snippets of dialogue serve to spotlight a character or attitude, while Raja Rao's adaptation of the traditional Indian story-telling convention justifies the narrator's tendency (as exemplified above) to present Moorthy in terms of an heroic archetype—that of the saintly sage (from Sankara to Gandhi) dedicated to Truth. Another virtue of the discursive style (see above in Ranganna's remarks) is that political comment is seen to come spontaneously from the characters instead of appearing to be artificially imposed upon the narrative by the author.

The preceding analysis of form, language and style in Kanthapura, though representative rather than definitive, provides evidence that Raja Rao achieved a fair measure of success in his attempt to make a kind of Indian-English an authentic basis for imaginative writing. The definition of this attempt in the "Author's Foreword" to Kanthapura is possibly the most succinct and acute statement that has yet been offered as a manifesto for Indians who write creatively in English. Raja Rao begins the Foreword by declaring that each Indian village has its own 'rich...legendary history' and that, as a result, 'the past mingles with the present, and the gods mingle with men to make the repertory of your grandmother always bright'. His intention was to tell the story of Kanthapura accordingly. But, as he says, this intention raises the complex question of language and style:

> The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word "alien", yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up—like Sanskrit or Persian was before—but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will

some day prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.

After language the next problem is that of style. The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression...we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to following it myself in this story. (pp.vii-viii)

Intended as a grandmother's 'repertory', then, in which 'episode follows episode' in the traditional story-telling manner, Kanthapura has a vitality of language and style which results from Raja Rao's ability to put into practice the literary principles outlined in the Foreword. The narrator is a physical and psychological presence in the story, like that of the Harikatha-man who, surrounded by an enthusiastic all-night audience in the village temple, retells the religious epics. Raja Rao employs a number of rhetorical devices to sustain the illusion that the reader is part of a live audience listening to the grandmother telling the tale of her village of Kanthapura; hence, for example, the frequent acknowledgements of the reader-s presence: 'Our village —I don't think you have ever heard about it' (p.1), 'what do you think?' (p.9), 'you know Jayaramachar ...?' (p.10), etc. The narrator is a Brahmin and, accordingly, her perceptions and feelings derive from a traditional sensibility. Thus she is quite

at home in the immemorial conventions of the story-teller. In her mind past naturally mingles with present and gods with men, and so it is with proper and sincere reverence (as distinct from artificial rhetoric) that at the beginning of her story she prays to the village goddess, Kenchamma: "O Kenchamma! Protect us always like this through famine and disease, death and despair...." (p.3), and so on.

The appropriateness of Raja Rao's narrative method is neatly verified, at the end of the first chapter, by the story told by Jayaramachar, a famous Harikatha-man who was brought to Kanthapura by Moorthy. But, besides this stylistic function, Jayaramachar's story also serves to introduce the political theme of the novel. As a Gandhi follower, Jayaramachar had dedicated his art to political education as well as entertainment. He gives his stories of the gods contemporary significance. Thus, in the story he tells the Kanthapura villagers Valmiki informs Brahma that India is enslaved by foreigners and requests that a god be incarnated on earth to free India. Then follows a description of the incarnated god—"a wise man and a soft man, and a saint" (p.12) who preaches Love, Truth and Non-Violence—who, of course, turns out to be Gandhi. This is a politically effective way of introducing Gandhi, in his role as national saviour, to the villagers. In the mythological context of a god intervening in the affairs of man, Gandhi's

principles and ideals have maning for the villagers; at the same time the Mahatma is correctly interpreted as someone fulfilling, not overthrowing, the Indian tradition.

Raja Rao implies that this is also a matter of social psychology: that if the masses are to accept Gandhi as their leader he must be meaningful to them in the context of their traditions and inherited beliefs. So, Raja Rao tells the reader by way of subtle indirection, if you are to understand how the Gandhian revolution was able to embrace the whole country, then you need to appreciate how Gandhi's principles not only were evolved from traditional wisdom but also were presented to millions of villagers in the light of their traditional attitudes to life.

To a non-Indian reader, then, it appears that one of the important authentic qualities of Kanthapura results from Raja Rao's understanding of the folk psyche and his talent for rendering this understanding artistically, particularly with respect to the narrator and her concrete mental impressions of the characters whose story she is telling. Of course certain folk elements are readily discernible on the surface of the novel, for example in the use of names in conjunction with folk appellations; such as, Waterfall Vankamma, Temple Lakshama, Coffee-planter Ramayya, Cornerhouse Moorthy, Pockmarked Sidda, etc. At the deeper psychological level folk predispositions are seen to underlie

social and personal attitudes. Superstition mingles with metaphysical intuition, for example, in the villagers' belief in their goddess's power of intervention in human affairs, their belief in the relevance of ancient pronouncements to the present, and in the idea of an hereditary fate.

Like the teller of tales in the oral tradition, Raja Rao's narrator is endowed with legitimate imaginative freedom; thus she assumes a reasonable omnisience in presenting some scenes (which she could have heard about only second-hand or even more remotely) as if she were physically present at the time. Bhatta's visit to Rangamma (pp.25-28) is one instance. Another key attribute, again consistent with the oral tradition, is the narrator's compassion. The maternal principle of compassion, symbolically evident in "The Cow of the Barricades", is basic both to Raja Rao's conception of the narrator's character and his use of point-of-view.

Raja Rao's comment that Indians 'regard maternity as the most sacred of earthly manifestations'[4] is relevant to his portrayal of the narrator, particularly her maternal fondness for Moorthy, and points to one of the important themes in both The Serpent and the Rope and The Cat and Shakespeare. That the compassion of

4 Kanthapura, in the Notes, p.204.

the Kanthapura grandmother is virtually all-enveloping is evident in her remark that the money-lender Bhatta 'was not a bad man' (p.25). Although his appetite for wealth and land is voracious, and he charges extortionate rates of interest, the narrator's remark is prompted by the recollection of Bhatta's act of disinterested charity in providing for the education of a distant relation.

For Raja Rao the pseudo-autobiographical point-of-view, the complexities of which he first appreciated fully in Kanthapura, has been by far the most important support to his narrative method. The compassionate sensitive Brahmin 'I' in Raja Rao's work comprises a number of important phases: youthful and emotionally susceptible in the stories "Javni" and "Akkayya", venerable and maternal in Kanthapura, and metaphysical in The Serpent and the Rope and The Cat and Shakespeare.

Another special narrative feature in Raja Rao's novels, which at this point can be demonstrated usefully by reference to Kanthapura, is the relationship of style to structure. Conversation and dialogue, presented in both indirect and direct speech, comprise a large part of the novel's structure. A stylistic characteristic resulting from Raja Rao's rhythmic use of point-of-view is seen in the way in which Raja Rao frequently achieves a synthesis of conversational tones—that of the narrator and of the characters in question—while at the same time preserving a sense

of distinct individual rhythms. The narrator's tone can therefore promote unity while preserving individual differences, without which the characters would fail to come to life. Feeling for the craft of writing is evident in many passages in which the narrator reports a conversation in indirect speech. Here is an example:

> As soon as Satammra saw Bhatta, she rose up quickly and asked why he had deigned to honour them so, and what happy news brought him there and how his wife and children were; and Bhatta answered it all by saying how very busy he had been, what with the bad rains and the sick cattle, and the manuring work and the hoeing work and the weeding work, and to top it all, those bonds and bonds and bonds to sign—really, if the very devils wanted to take his place, he would say, Take it! and bless those generous souls. (p.25)

Here the tone is carefully handled so that a balance is maintained between the narrator's sympathetic objective gestures of voice and Bhatta's hypocritical dual tone of surface complaining and inner satisfaction.

Raja Rao's often-used leviathan sentences also contribute significantly to the structure of Kanthapura, and are in keeping with his comments in the Foreword about the interminableness of the Indian story-telling style. Long sentences prove useful, for example, in transporting the reader to an unfamiliar locality; in providing a sense of action, of diverse comings and goings and violent skirmishes; and in creating tangible

images of the populous variety of India. The second sentence (25 lines long) of Chapter Four is stylistically appropriate for what it is describing: carts with lolling bells rolling down to the markets along a meandering network of tracks and roads. Similarly, the second sentence (66 lines long) of Chapter Five admirably suggests in its very construction the vastness of the Skeffington Coffee Estate, the ever-spreading always-devouring progress of imperialism, the armies of coolies marching towards it, the mountains of false promises and futile hopes.

Complementary to Raja Rao's skilful manipulation of long sentences is the descriptive power which he is able to generate through animated and rhythmic language. Thus he is able to convey effectively that notable Indian experience, the arrival of the monsoon (see pp.50-1), by projecting from nature into words the experience of this phenomenon; hence 'trees bleat and blubber' and the air is 'juggling' etc.

Considered in terms of the development of the Indian novel in English, Kanthapura clearly has a special place as the first work to demonstrate convincingly, in terms of form and content, that the novel in English was a medium which could be adapted to the Indian sensibility. The present discussion has attempted to offer some idea of how Raja Rao accomplished this in formal terms. So far as content is concerned, C.D. Narasimhaiah's

article "Raja Rao's Kanthapura: an Analysis"[5] exhausts the main points; also it is interesting to note that Narasimhaiah regards Kanthapura as a 'minor classic' (p.77) and the most 'authentic account of village life among novels written in the English language' (p.55). As Narasimhaiah points out, there are three main levels of experience in this novel: political, religious and social. And, indeed, Kanthapura is valuable and interesting from the sociological point of view. If it were not for the fact that it is more profitable critically to look at Raja Rao's work as a totality, and that his characteristic fictional tendency (as is evident from his last two novels) is metaphysical and philosophical rather than socio-political, then Kanthapura should have been included in the earlier discussion of social trends in the Indian novel.

To begin with Kanthapura is one of the best (if not the best) Gandhian novels in English. The hero, Moorthy, exemplifies in theory and practice the Gandhian ideals of Ahimsa and Satyagraha, and is accordingly a somewhat idealised character, as Narasimhaiah says. Moorthy is a young Brahmin and former student, and is independent-minded with respect to marriage; he becomes leader of the village Congress committee and is excommunicated from the Brahmin brotherhood for

5 The Literary Criterion, Vol. VII No. 2 Summer 1966, pp.54-77.

putting into practice Gandhi's untouchable policy. Moorthy befriends the local Pariahs, mixes with them, and works for their educational advancement. He treats them as equals in the political struggle and fights for their social and economic rights as human beings. The effect on his orthodox mother of his excommunication—she dies of shame and guilt—is indicative of the moral intensity with which Hindu communal mores are felt and practised by its orthodox members. Thus, in portraying the life of a single village, Raja Rao, as early as 1938, raised the controversial question of caste and untouchability in a convincing non-polemical way and in terms of the complex political, religious and social implications which were involved.

Moorthy's status as a discipline of the Mahatma becomes increasingly evident. He undertakes a fast in order to achieve self-purification and to expiate the guilt he feels at being indirectly responsible for violence occasioned by police brutality. The way to political leadership through Ahimsa is ascetic. "The fault of others", Moorthy says, "is the fruit of one's own disharmony" (p.61). Because of the fasting and meditation, 'he had caught a little... primordial radiance, and through every breath more and more love seemed to pour out of him' (p.64). Later on in the novel when the Congress, in reaction to Gandhi's arrest, decides not to recognise the

Government nor pay its taxes, Moorthy's address to the people is quintessential Gandhi; Ahimsa and Satyagraha:

"...remember each one of you is responsible for the harm done by another, and the first time violence is done against the police or those that are not with us, we shall stop the movement and wait for six months and more in penance and in prayer that our sins may be purified. Brothers and sisters, remember we are not out to fight the white man or the white man's slaves, the police and the revenue officials, but against the demoniac corruption that has entered their hearts, and the purer we are the greater will be our victory, for the victory we seek is the victory of the heart. Send out love where there is hatred, and a smile against brute force like unto the waters of the Himavathy that spread over boulder and sand and crematorium earth....I ask of you, be not awed by the circumstances, but rather follow on and on, follow the one who follows me...For who, sisters, but the first daughter milks the cow when the mother is ill? Obey your chief and love your enemy, that is all I ask of you." (pp.125-6)

If Kanthapura has a message, it is this. And in Moorthy's speech Raja Rao captures the profound spirit, the gentle firmness, the oratory of the heart in plain speech and homely understanding, which Gandhi's public image epitomised.

So far as Raja Rao's early work is concerned, then, the western reader should be able to appreciate it on a meaningful level. In the case of Kanthapura the main problems of critical judgement exist with respect, firstly, to the process of transmission whereby the Indian's 'emotional make-up' (to borrow the phrase from the novel's

Foreword) is rendered in English, and, secondly, to matters concerning accuracy of portraiture and social observation. However, when we turn to The Serpent and The Rope and The Cat and Shakespeare we very soon become aware of the author's complexity of mind and sensibility, and that his persona is a concrete continuous subtle presence in these novels.

That The Serpent and the Rope and The Cat and Shakespeare are, in some sense, autobiographical is hinted at in the following statement from The Serpent and the Rope:

> ...all books are autobiographies...all have a beginning in the man who wrote the book, have absorbed his nights ...They all represent a bit of oneself, and for those who can read rightly, the whole of oneself. The style of a man—whether he writes on the Aztecs or on pelargonium—the way he weaves word against word, intricates the existence of sentences with the values of sound, makes a comma here, puts a dash there: all are signs of his inner movement, the speed of his life, his breath (prana), the nature of his thought, the ardour and age of his soul. Short sentences and long sentences, parentheses and points of interrogation, are not only curves in the architecture of thought, but have an intimate, a private relation with your navel, your genitals, the vibrance of your eyesight.[6]

The main argument put forward here, of course, is that the style of man will inevitably pervade his work and that the work accordingly will emanate from the

6 The Serpent and the Rope, John Murray, 1960, p.168.

author's 'whole' self and from his idiosyncracies. As one of the major themes of The Serpent and the Rope is the hero's search for self-knowledge, Raja Rao has in mind self in the Hindu sense. He regards language as basic to the quest: 'He who possesses Sanscrit', Rama claims, 'can possess himself' (p.37). Hence, as can be seen from the above passage, appreciation of Raja Rao's stylistic peculiarities will be as fundamental to our understanding of The Serpent and The Rope as it is in the case of Kanthapura. So far as the novel considered as autobiography is concerned, the few biographical facts about Raja Rao which are accessible to us indicate an at-least superficial resemblance between Rama (the central character in The Serpent and The Rope) and Raja Rao: both lived in France, studied history there and married Frenchwomen.

Some novels fail through excessive or constricting subjectivity, and this is a danger against which Raja Rao had to be on his guard in The Serpent and The Rope where the introspective aspects of theme, the autobiographical emphasis, use of the main character as first-person narrator, the inclusion of material in diary form and stylistic individuality all encourage the subjective approach. While the extraordinary thematic diversity of the novel is one reason why it is an interesting and challenging achievement, the story is also saved from the vices of egoism because of Raja Rao's

detached disciplined objective conception of Rama's narrative role. About half-way through the novel Rama insists on this aspect of his narrative record:

> ...I am not telling a story here, I am writing the sad and uneven chronicle of a life, my life, with no art or decoration, but with the 'objectivity', the discipline of the 'historical sciences', for by taste and tradition I am only an historian. (p.233)

One of Rama's main objectives is philosophical: to comprehend reality and approach Truth in terms of the 'I', the metaphysical 'I' rather than the personal ego. Also, the historical approach, based on Raja Rao's extensive reading in world history from medieval times to the present, contributes significantly to the presentation of the cultural theme, in particular the meeting of Eastern and Western cultures and the thesis that India transcends history and locality.

Rama's claim that his chronicle is without art is somewhat modest, though it is clear from The Serpent and the Rope and The Cat and Shakespeare that Raja Rao's idea of the novel as a work of art may well be compatible with the concept of the anti-novel. Nevertheless, his novels can be discussed meaningfully in terms of art, the art of language in particular, and in relation to a romantic theory of literature to which Raja Rao seems to subscribe. The following entry in Rama's diary, distinguishing the feeling type of person from the knowing type, implies that Rama's

approach to life is romantic rather than classical and is related to a keen consciousness of personal imperfection:

"...Georges...thinks I "feel" Sanscrit, I do not "know" Sanscrit....The classical mind has a grandeur I shall never possess. I am too weak, so I see stars where others see planets." (p.81)

In romantic terms, art may be thought of as the imaginative consequence of the awareness of the imperfections of man and his world. Rama's enigmatic statement—'The fig leaf, perhaps, was the first civilized act of art' (p.144)—is not as gratuitous as it first seems. This statement seems to imply that where perfection is, art is irrelevant, un-thought-of. Art results from the civilized consciousness of imperfection—from Adam's knowledge of good and evil and of his sins, from Adam's consciousness of sex and mortality. Art aspires to the perfection that once was, to an unselfconscious eternity of purely natural existence when art was uncreated in the mind of man, being life itself not the imitation of life. Art aspires to that Edenic perfection that was, as the Brahmin aspires to the spiritual perfection of the soul that will be. Art's ideal is the illusion that life is the myth of perfection. Hence the Fall into imperfection brought consciousness, and out of consciousness came the need for civilized discretion, came the dream of art.

Rama, the feeling type, is the romantic wanderer and holy vagabond who is driven by a 'natural love of the impossible' (p.8): 'The impossible is the reality, the fervent is the intrepid, the passionate, the high' (p.170). Rama does not believe in death, he seeks the death of death. Philosophically, he adopts the romantic attitude I exist, therefore the world exists as opposed to the classical or empirical view, the world exists, therefore I exist. His aspiration for perfection—for the recognition of himself in his eternity and the knowledge of 'the formless form of Truth' (p.408)—is Brahminical, the culmination of a sensibility conditioned over thousands of years. Relevant to this is the following extract from Rama's diary:

'...I suppose our sensibility—made more for talking to the gods than to man, made more for formulating the incalculable than the concrete—our mind slips round objects with the facility of water over pebbles....Oh, this fight against the contingency of modern life, of modern civilization; the battle is lost before it's begun! We've the fibres to know, not the sinews to act: We, the real impotents of the earth.' (p.147)

The alien of modern life is often a romantic. The romantic impulse, which in Rama's case leads to such abstractions as love is the loving of love, is in inverse proportion to the impotence the Brahmin feels as a result of 'the contingency of modern life'.

Rama, however, does regard himself as an historian, a detached chronicler, not an artist. Accordingly he ultimately seeks not the perfections of the sensuous imagination but the absolute of Truth. Thus the growth of his personality is a metamorphosis of romantic impulse into ascetic metaphysics. Rama's thesis on the Albigensian heresy provides Raja Rao with an opportunity to elaborate on the Paradisal aspiration. The tenth chapter of the thesis, as Rama explains, deals 'with the metaphysical symbolism of Paradise':

> Paradise, I argued, was the inversion of Truth. To see frankly is not necessarily to see fairly—you can look at a thing upside down. After all the deer went to drink water at the mirage. The Impossible becomes the beautiful. Love becomes divided against itself.
>
> Heresy, I continued, was the near-Truth seen as Truth. Heresy is romantic...heresy is the promise of Paradise. Heresy is the masculine turned feminine for protection...Paradise is a feminine continuity in a cul-de-sac, it is the deification of death, the immortality of mortality; Paradise, therefore, is full of angels. Eternity is a masculine concept. To accept eternity is to dare annihilation. To be dissolved is not to be reborn. But Paradise is to continue as one is—as a ghost is supposed to be—only not in darkness but in light. Not to dare annihilation but to continue is to affirm the tangibility of the object. In a Paradise created outside of time, isolate and blue, as in some of the medieval manuscripts—with queens, gardens and palaces, and turrets; white horses, story-telling pygmies, the unicorn, and angels trumpeting; with the river of paradise flowing as milk—you create the isolation of

love. You keep your body pure for Paradise...You jump into fire and become pure, because you will go to Paradise. So Paradise becomes the fulfilment of love. (pp.382-3)

Although for a time Rama succumbs to this heresy —'Paradise! I thought, does, does exist' (p.390)—he does not attain 'fulfilment of love', Platonically or otherwise, in the Paradisal sense. At the end of the novel Rama and Madeleine are divorced and Rama's aspiration has led to the realisation that for him, as for all true Brahmins, the 'simple... ever-lit Truth' (p.410) is that he must be where he should be and that his 'real home' (p.411) is in Travancore. Truth, not Paradise, is his only possible goal. Ultimately freedom and understanding lie in daring annihilation. Dissolution is the final destiny even of Brahma.

Does the rejection of Paradise for Truth imply the rejection of art for philosophy or metaphysics? Underlying this question are two important critical issues. Firstly, if the answer to the question is yes, is The Serpent and the Rope a novel and if so what kind of novel is it? Secondly, to what extent can Rama's private approach to life be equated with Raja Rao's in the latter's capacity as author as distinct from his persona identity as Rama? In view of these issues, then, it is important to remember that if the 'I' of the novel does not find the artistic view-point

relevant or necessary to his personal record and to the main concerns of his life, it does not follow that the same applies to the outside mind of the author. After all, Raja Rao's characterisation of Rama is achieved with feeling and fidelity. As a three-dimensional character worked out in terms of specific human situations and extended soliloquy, Rama is a product of the artistic imagination. Admittedly, there are times when the language of philosophy, conundrum and abstraction becomes tedious and strains the illusion that the novel is a re-creation of life. But, The Serpent and the Rope is a novel, essentially because of the characterisation, while epithets such as 'philosophical', 'metaphysical', 'autobiographical' and even 'romantic' help to define the kind of novel it is.

Moreover, in The Serpent and the Rope Raja Rao is concerned with one of the perennial themes of literature: spiritual aspiration. Accordingly, the novel can be discussed meaningfully in terms of the romantic or metaphysical aesthetic theory prompted by the statement the 'fig leaf, perhaps was the first civilized act of art' and propounded earlier. Rama's search for the meaning of self and existence (which results in the equation existence = 'I') culminates not in the isolation of love (Paradise) but in the isolation of ascetic meditation (Truth). Paradise

and Truth seem incompatible, and the former is experienced only as intellectual hypothesis and as an aspect of a learned discussion. In The Cat and Shakespeare, however, spiritual aspiration is more mystical, imaginative, celebratory, sensuous and less intellectual, scholastic, elegiac, ascetic; a spiritual extension of everyday experience rather than an exclusive renunciation of Maya.

Raja Rao's concept of the novel as art, in this his most recent novel, is a logical development from the point reached in The Serpent and the Rope: for in The Cat and Shakespeare Raja Rao's art fundamentally aspires to a synthesis of Paradise and Truth; it is a vision of life culminating in the symbolic and human realisation of love conjoined with reality. Ramakrishna Pai (the narrator) finds meaning and fulfilment in life through his mistress Shantha, who gives him love and a child, and through his guru-type friend Govindan Nair, who helps to create in him a knowledge of reality. The artistic organisation of the novel's material depends on symbols as well as philosophical exegesis, and the symbols are conceived in a spirit of metaphysical comedy, as concrete expression derived from actual experience: sea, tree, cat, wall, house, war, boils, fleas, train, scales (for weighing), garden etc. The climax of the novel involves Ramakrishna's discovery of the world beyond the wall that passes by his house and marks the boundary of his daily routine life. He crosses the wall and finds a huge garden stretching for miles. This is

symbolic of the new awareness of life, of reality, which Govindan Nair and Shantha have helped him attain. Thus, 'the metaphysical symbolism of Paradise', which in The Serpent and the Rope was a matter of abstract speculation, is in The Cat and Shakespeare a concrete symbol related to specific life experiences.

Truth is the knowledge of Paradise, Paradise is the experience of Truth. Govindan Nair taught Ramakrishna the meaning of the cat: that all men are kittens being carried by the cat, the mother principle; that to accept this is the best way to be and to know. The cat is the metaphysical equivalent of Shantha, who is the human equivalent of the sacredness of Woman, whose function is to reveal in man the truth of himself to himself. On one important level of meaning The Cat and Shakespeare is an expanded affirmation of the following statement in The Serpent and the Rope:

> One cannot possess the world, one can become it: I could not possess Savithri—I became I. Hence the famous saying of Yagnyavalkya to his wife, 'The husband does not love the wife for the wife's sake, the husband loves the wife for the sake of the Self in her.' (pp.172-3)

Savithri, the Platonic mistress of The Serpent and the Rope, thus becomes Shantha, the complete feminine principle (flesh, soul and mother) in The Cat and Shakespeare. Shantha tells Ramakrishna:

> "I say, to say I love you is to say I love myself."... "Sage Yagnyavalkya said so."..."I can see you have never

been across the wall. For there you could touch me and see yourself touch me."[7]

(Seeing in this sense is a supranatural as well as sensory faculty). Of the cat Shantha says: "She knows the self. So she is the self" (p.91).

It is significant that it was by following the cat with her litter of kittens that Ramakrishna first 'went across the wall'. Here is what he saw:

I found a garden all rosy and gentle. There were bowers and many sweet-smelling herbs, there were pools and many orchids that smelled from a distance. There were old men with beards as long as their knees, and they talked to no one. Young men were in green turbans and others, children and women, sang or danced to no tune but to the tune of trees. Snakes lived there in plenty, and the mongoose roamed all about the garden. I saw deer, too. The air was so like a mirror you just walked toward yourself. How is it I never knew my neighbouring wall went up and down the road...I had also met some of my neighbours....How is it I never saw the others anywhere, or when I saw them I did not know they were her, across the wall? The fact of the fact is that I was too lazy to know who lived there. Truly to speak, if Govindan Nair had not come...I should never have gone beyond...There wouldnnot have been even Shantha (who came to me because she love the way Govindan Nair and I talked). Truth is such a beautiful thing—a beautiful woman like Shantha loves to hear the truth talked, because it explains her beauty and takes away her responsibility. Lord, how can anyone bear the burden of beauty?

7 The Cat and Shakespeare, New York, Macmillan, 1965,p.91.

So that day I walked behind the cat. It went down into the kitchen of the White House...Then it went up a series of stone steps....I heard a very lovely music. I was breathless. The staircase suddenly turned, and in went the cat. I stood there white as marble. I looked in and saw everything.

I saw nose (not the nose) and eyes seeing eyes seeing, I saw ears curved to make sound visible, and face and limbs rising in perfection of perfection, for form was it. I saw love yet know not its name but heard it as sound, I saw truth not as fact but as ignition. I could walk into fire and be cool, I could sing and be silent, I could hold myself and yet not be there. I saw feet. They made flowers on stems and the curved hands of children. I smelled a breath that was of nowhere but rising in my nostrils sank back into me, and found death was at my door. I woke up and found death had passed by, telling me I had no business to be there. Then where was I? Death said it had died. I had killed death. When you see death as death, you kill it. When you say, I am so and so, and you say I am such and such, you have killed yourself. I remain over, having killed myself. (pp.112-4)

In this remarkable and significant passage, with its echoes from such traditions as the medieval romance, Spenserian allegory and the Rajput paintings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the long sought-for synthesis of Paradise and Truth is achieved. The Paradise garden is attractive and tranquil ('rosy and gentle') and in it harmony prevails: harmony of youth and old age, reptile and animal. This harmony is totally <u>natural</u>: 'the tune of trees', and the 'lovely music' which accompanies Ramakrishna's spiritual awakening.

In this garden setting the Hindu can achieve his spiritual goal of knowing the self: 'The air was so like a mirror you just walked toward yourself'. To enter the garden the aspirant must overcome spiritual apathy and inertia; Ramakrishna had been 'too lazy' to cross the wall sooner. He needs a guru (in Ramakrishna's case Govindan Nair), who shows the way to Truth, and Woman in whom the knowledge of Truth is Beauty incarnate. (This is similar to Keats's romantic credo in "Ode on a Grecian Urn".) Spiritual sight is a condition of seeing 'eyes ... seeing eyes seeing', the ambiguity of which is perhaps a little less puzzling when we realise that Raja Rao is describing a spiritual process whereby the self-blinding ego is overthrown. And so, as Ramakrishna reaches this point, we see him seeing reality, not illusion, the essence of forms, not merely their physical imitations; we see him seeing the essence of creation, the creative spark ('ignition') of 'truth' the 'perfection' of 'form'. This knowledge and fulfilment release the enlightened being from the laws of nature, from Maya: 'I could walk into fire and be cool, I could sing and be silent, I could hold myself and yet not be there'. Death, too, is only a law of nature and therefore can be overcome ('killed'); the ego obeys the law, but when the spiritual 'I' kills the ego death is dead. Thus Ramakrishna's spiritual illumination enables him to see beyond the cycles of creation and destruction and, ultimately, to extinguish self, to be

spiritually freed from the illusory cycles of existence, and become one with the great self, the non-dual One.

Thus, so far as Raja Rao's theme of spiritual aspiration is concerned, a consideration of The Serpent and the Rope and The Cat and Shakespeare side by side reveals a developing pattern of meaning. With regard to Raja Rao's concept of artistic form, the extent to which sequential scrutiny of these two novels is critically revealing has already been noted. The same applies to theme; spiritual aspiration, for example, involves other themes, such as Woman and the reality-illusion problem, which are central to both novels. At this point, therefore, an examination of the complicated thematic structure of The Serpent and the Rope is desirable.

Most critics who have analysed The Serpent and the Rope at length believe it to be a considerable achievement.[8] C.D. Narasimhaiah, for instance, claims that Raja Rao is 'a major novelist' and that The Serpent and the Rope is 'clearly destined to be a classic, not merely by national but by the most exacting international standards which have helped to establish the 'great tradition of the English Novel''.[9] One measure of

8 See in particular: Ahmed Ali, "Illusion and Reality: The Art and Philosophy of Raja Rao", The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, July 1968 No. 5, pp.16-28; S. Nagarajan, "An Indian Novel", Sewanee Review, Vol. 74 Summer 1964, pp.512-7; C.D. Narasimhaiah, "Raja Rao: The Serpent and the Rope", The Literary Criterion, Vol. V No.4 Summer 1963, pp.62-89.

9 "Raja Rao: The Serpent and The Rope", pp.89,88.

value in a work of literature is the scope and greatness of its themes. Accordingly, one of the important functions of criticism has been to distinguish great from trivial themes, and this has contributed to the process of discrimination whereby significant works of literature have been set apart from the lesser works thatmake up the bulk of a literary tradition. Without making grandiose claims for The Serpent and the Rope, and at the same time recognising that greatness of theme does not of itself ensure artistic success, it is nevertheless a fact that Raja Rao's novel explores a large number of the great themes of literature. Simply to list the novel's themes is to give some idea of the remarkable aspiration which underlies it, and which Raja Rao has been careful not to make over-obtrusive.

Here, then, is a list of these themes, most of which are introduced or alluded to in the opening chapter: metaphysical conjecture concerning God, Truth, Immortality, Death, Time, Eternity, Duality and Non-Duality; the nature of Reality and Illusion (examined from the Vedantic point of view); the inner nature of personality and the search for identity (examined mainly from the Brahminical point of view, but also in terms of Western experience); the acquisition of faith in the heroic ideal and the noble standard; the dignity of man; the theme of the wanderer, of life conceived as a journey or pilgrimage, of human loneliness and isolation; the quest for self-knowledge;

the nature of ideal, fraternal and sexual love, and the meaning of marriage; tradition and the experience of family life; the influence of social concepts on individual behaviour; holiness, happiness, sorrow, and the sainthood of natural living; the meaning of history, science and religious experience; the nature of good and evil; the meaning of India, Benares and Vedanta; the meeting of East and West; Romanticism versus Classicism, feeling versus knowing; Beauty and the idea of art; the meaning of meaning and the function of language; the problem of the ego in relation to Dharma, Destiny and Existence; the role of the spiritual friend or Guru.

Such a diversity of interest tends to make conspicuous the absence of materialistic preoccupations in The Serpent and The Rope. The relationship between money and morality or codes of social behaviour, which of course has been prominent in the history of the novel, is of no consequence in Raja Rao's novel. His vision of life is not dependent on materialistic criteria, except in the most elementary sense. The realisation of the spiritual principle ultimately depends on the dissolution of the material principle, a view which underlies some of Rama's conversational paradoxes; for example:

"...Death is a left-over of existence. Nothing really dies: even death does not die. All continues. Ultimately nothing continues. For that which is itself cannot continue in itself...." (p.190)

It is no doubt convenient that none of the characters in the novel need worry about money (Madeleine and Rama each has a private income to add to her salary as a College lecturer; Savithri is the daughter of an affluent Raja; Georges and Lezo have academic incomes presumably adequate to satisfy their passion for scholarship); but there is also the fact that the main characters are free from the possessive or acquisitive motive (sexually, Lezo is a warm-blooded exception) and this is in keeping with the Vedantic view that the instinct to possess signifies a blind desire for illusory things and is therefore fundamentally fruitless.

Thus, such social issues relating to money and poverty, which are central to the Indian sociological novel, and motives like avarice, status-seeking, ambition etc., which figure prominently in the bourgeois and the proletarian novel, are not emphasized by Raja Rao. The primary motivation that Raja Rao examines involves self-exploration and the human being's thirst for a companionable relationship with his own kind.

Admittedly, Rama does enjoy pontificating about Marxism, Communism and materialism to Savithri and her Cambridge friends. These discussions, though, are framed in terms of the opposition between a material view of life and Indian anti-materialism, between 'the materialism of Stalin' (p.208) and India which 'has no

history, for Truth cannot have history' (p.104). Remembering Rama's earlier remark, "that which is itself cannot continue in itself" (p.190), we can appreciate that Rama is predicting for Marxism historical senility when he says "The only trouble with Marxism was it ended with itself" (p.187). However, it is clear from the discussion with the student Swanston that Rama's main premise is philosophical, not historical:

> "Materialism...can only lead to the acknowledgement of the object as real."
> "The object is real," protested Swanston...
> "Nobody has yet known an object in the whole history of humanity," I added. (p.191)

It is precisely because of this philosophy that The Serpent and the Rope belongs so definitely to the non- or anti-materialistic tradition of literature, a tradition more of poetry than of the novel. And hence the metaphysical background to the novel's thematic structure.

The opening page of The Serpent and the Rope provides an introductory example of the correlation between theme and metaphysical attitude which is the backbone of the novel:

> I WAS BORN a Brahmin—that is, devoted to Truth and all that. 'Brahmin is he who knows Brahman,' etc. etc.... But how many of my ancestors since the excellent Yagnyavalkya, my legendary and Upanishadic ancestor, have really known the Truth excepting the Sage Mādhava, who founded an Empire, or, rather, helped to build an Empire,

and wrote some of the most profound of Vedantic texts since Sri Sankara? There were others, so I'm told, who left hearth and riverside fields, and wandered to mountains distant and hermitages 'to see God face to face'. And some of them did see God face to face and built temples. But when they died—for indeed they did 'die'—they too must have been burnt by tank or grove or meeting of two rivers, and they too must have known they did not die. Who is it that tells me they did not die? Who but me.

So my ancestors went one by one and were burnt, and their ashes have gone down the rivers.

Whenever I stand in a river I remember how when young, on the day the monster ate the moon and the day fell into an eclipse, I used with tie and kusha grass to offer the manes my filial devotion. For withal I was a good Brahmin. I even knew Grammar and the Brahma Sutras, read the Upanishads at the age of four, was given the holy thread at seven—because my mother was dead and I had to perform her funeral ceremonies, year after year—my father having married again. So with wet cloth and an empty stomach, with devotion, and sandal paste on my forehead, I fell before the rice-balls of my mother and I sobbed. I was born an orphan, and have remained one. I have wandered the world and have sobbed in hotal rooms and in trains, have looked at the cold mountains and sobbed, for I had no mother. One day, and that was when I was twenty-two, I sat in an hotel—it was in the Pyrenees —and I sobbed, for I knew I would never see my mother again. (p.7)

The opening sentence of the novel rings with annunciation. One of the narrator's aims, clearly, is to reveal himself, and in particular, to indicate what it means to be a Brahmin and to feel the ancestral spiritual compulsion 'to see God face to face'. The tone in the opening sentence—almost of weariness, of scepticism even in the deflating 'and all that'—is

appropriate to the narrator's situation: firstly, because Rama feels within him ancient presences which provide him with a sense of his own spiritual timelessness; secondly, because since birth he has been conditioned by the sorrow of having no mother into the ways of devout obligation; and thirdly, because he has been a lonely wanderer of the world who has experienced something of the world's suffering and pain and the mellowing influence of life. Rama is like the speaker in Christopher Brennan's poem "The Wanderer", who has an 'ancient heart'[10] and asks himself 'How old is my heart, how old, how old is my heart...?' (p.30). Indeed, the concluding lines of "The Wanderer" are, in theme and mood, profoundly akin to Rama's experience of life:

> I seem'd at home in some old dream of kingship:
> now it is clear grey day and the road is plain,
> I am the wanderer of many years
> who cannot tell if ever he was king
> or if ever kingdoms were: I know I am
> the wanderer of the ways of all the worlds,
> to whom the sunshine and the rain are one
> and one to stay or hasten, because he knows
> no ending of the way, no home, no goal,
> and phantom night and the grey day alike
> withhold the heart where all my dreams and days
> might faint in soft fire and delicious death:
> and saying this to myself as a simple thing

10 Christopher Brennan "The Wanderer", The Penguin Book of Australian Verse (edited by John Thompson, Kenneth Slessor and R.G. Howarth), Penguin Books, 1958, p.34. All subsequent page references are to this edition. Cp. 'the ardour and age of his soul', The Serpent and the Rope, p.168.

> I feel a peace fall in the heart of the winds
> and a clear dusk settle, somewhere, far in me.
> (p.34)

Sankara and the Sage Mādhava embody Rama's 'old dream of kingship'. Kingship for Rama is an impersonal principle which, like the Zero, is beyond dualism, and is a state where, according to Rama, 'I am the "I"' (p.207). Between reality and the treacheries of illusion, Rama tells Madeleine, "One—The Guru—brings you the lantern; the road is seen, the long, white road, going with the statutory stars' (p.340). By the end of the novel when Rama is divorced from Madeleine, Savithri and his sister Saroja are both settled in marriage, and he feels able to give Little Mother no more joy than "a pilgrimage once in two years", Rama records in his diary that wanderer's sense of homelessness which Brennan described:

> '...There is nobody to go to now: no home, no temple, no city, no climate, no age.
> 'Kashwann koham Kutha āyatha ka mē Janani ko mē tātah?
> Who are you and whose; whence have you come? 'Wheresoever I am is my country, and I weep into my bed...' (p.407)

This theme of the orphan wanderer also suggests a perhaps more pertinent comparison, so far as The Serpent and the Rope is concerned, that of a classic novel so different in kind: Melville's Moby Dick. Like Rama,

Ishmael is an orphan wanderer who at the end of the story 'escaped alone' and was picked up by 'the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan'.[11] In each novel the nomadic 'I' is, as well as an individual belonging to a clearly-defined time and place, also an archetypal being: Ishmael, as his name suggests, derives from Biblical tradition. Both novels are about man's search for Absolute Truth, and this is cast in terms of pilgrimage—the idea of life as a journey. Ishmael becomes a sea-wanderer partly for metaphysical reasons not unlike those that influence Rama—because of a condition of soul and an involuntary preoccupation with death:

> Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is damp, drizzly November in my soul; wherever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet...I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. (p.7)

Moby Dick has been highly regarded partly because of the metaphysical implications of the narrative: Ahab and his crew are seen as having come face to face with death and the ultimate. The action of The Serpent and the Rope, of course, is considerably less exciting

11 Herman Melville, Moby Dick, Dent (Everymans), 1949, p.493. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

and eventful than that of Moby Dick, and is mainly psychological anyway; but both novels can be described as epic meditations on life and the spiritual cosmos, and in this sense what the ocean is to Melville—'meditation and water are wedded forever' (p.8), Ishmael asserts—India, Benares and the holy Ganges are to Raja Rao. Moreover, both writers are too acutely aware of the paradoxical character of life (consider for example the implications of the whale's whiteness, and Rama's ancestors who 'indeed...did 'die'' knowing 'they did not die') to present their metaphysical vision naively or tritely, or to dilute it either too much or too little. That a comparison between these two novels can be made seriously at this level is some indication that The Serpent and the Rope merits critical attention.

From the point of view of interpretation, then, such attention must focus on the fact that for Rama life is a Pilgrimage in a special Indian sense. Although he was brought up in the ancestral shadow of his grandfather who was 'a noble type, a heroic figure' (p.8), and whose horse-riding exploits were legendary and 'impossible', and although his mother wanted him to be a prince, he had in fact become a humble perplexed wanderer.

> ...since I could not be a prince—I was born a Brahmin, and so how could I be king—I wandered my life away, and became a holy vagabond. (p.11)

(Later in Cambridge he records—p.163—'I felt what I am, a pilgrim'.)

Early in the novel, when Rama has returned to India to perform his father's funeral rites, he realises that for him the most crucial problem in life is a sense of inner 'absence' which related to his ignorance concerning the nature of his pilgrimage:

> Something had just missed me in life, some deep absence grew in me, like a coco-nut on a young tree, that no love or learning could fulfil....I wondered where all this wandering would lead to. Life is a Pilgrimage I know, but a Pilgrimage to where—and of what?
> ...The Ganges alone seemed to carry a meaning, and I could not understand what she said. (p.28)

Rama returns to France where he attempts to find this meaning through Madeleine ('love') and historical research ('learning'). Shortly his needs crystallise within him:

> I wanted a companion of pilgrimage, for if you gaze long at the mountain, where after twist on twist of the bridal path the bells ring and the evening of worship has come, you want to lie at the feet of God together and unalone. Oh, to go to God and alone.... (p.100)

The bridal path to God or to go to God alone: that is the basic question, the chief issue of Dharma, which Raja Rao works out in terms of Rama's soul-searching and his relationships with Madeleine and Savithri.

(It also involves, at the philosophical level, the serpent or the rope question, which will be considered later.) It is characteristic of Raja Rao's imaginative enterprise that he is able to make one of the most hackneyed situations in literature—the love triangle—the basis of his weighty themes and the means whereby they are made effective and humanly meaningful. However abstruse discussion of The Serpent and the Rope becomes, it should not be forgotten that the story is very moving; the sadness is real and unsentimentalised, and there are many memorable moments of profound pathos, such as the occasion when Rama laughs Hamlet-like on hearing that his child was born dead. It should also be remembered that Raja Rao is not looking at marriage and infidelity through Western eyes. In fact, when the bewildered reader of The Cat and Shakespeare abandons his Western attitudes to, and notions of, the extramarital relationship, he will discover to his surprise that the novel is not only about a man's relationship with his mistress but also that 'infidelity' so-called is presented in an astonishingly beautiful and idealistic light. Ramakrishna says:

> I have developed a bad habit. I like women. Not that I like all sorts of women. I like woman, in fact. What is woman, you may ask. Well, woman is Shantha...And Shantha is not just a woman, she is woman. (p.20)

This confession, half-comic in tone, is not that of a debonair rake, as at first sight it may seem, but of a man who believes in woman as a divine principle and is orthodox in so believing.

Ramakrishna and Shantha discover that their marriage was truly made in Heaven, and the delightful last line of the novel—'Suddenly I hear the music of marriage. I must go' (p.117)—is vibrant with consummation. To this real marriage of flesh and spirit Rama and Madeleine also aspire. During their stay at Montpalais they experience some of those sweet moments of deep intimacy which are the basis of true union. In his diary of August 31, Rama records:

> '...Womanhood has been swelling up in her for some days. Last night she rose as she always has, with a single gesture, and on my sick bed in the chapel of Montpalais, when the night was clear as one's knowledge of oneself, she became my wife again and I called her many sweet names. I also called her my Isobel, and she gave a laugh that the mountains might have seen as a ripple of lightning.
>
> 'I am such a different man today. For to wed a woman you must wed her God.' (p.86)

The attempts by Rama and Madeleine to wed each other's gods may well remind the reader of Lawrence and The Man Who Died in particular, though the carnal basis of Raja Rao's mysticism is taken for granted[12] rather than

12 An exception to this, however, is the sexual lyricism of Rama's diary entries, pp.160-6.

sensuously theorised about. Also akin to the Lawrencian philosophy are Rama's respect for 'the sainthood of natural living'—the 'pure of heart' 'live truly' (p.54), he comments—and the belief that self-realisation can be achieved through love:

'...To anoint oneself in worshipping another is the basis of all love. We become ourself by becoming another.' (p.82)

On the basis of the Vedantic idea that the world is as you make it, Rama and Madeleine prove to themselves the reality of the gods by identifying specific deities with tangible objects which have a purely personal significance. Thus the stone beside the door of their villa is to them Shiva's vehicle——the bull—and each day they feel it grass as a gesture of reverence. The huge rock on the hill is an elephant god from whom they regularly seek spiritual empathy and the tranquillity necessary to meditation. Madeleine 'felt that between the Villa Ste-Anne and the elephant on the hill was the space of joy. Beyond was barbary' (p.59). However, inherent in the attempts by Rama and Madeleine to wed each other's gods is a fundamental flaw in their relationship. As Rama moves away from Buddhism Madeleine gets deeper into it; as he anguishes for his Christian becoming she seeks compassion for the 'object' through a puri-

fying denial of the 'subject'. But Rama can only be himself, that is a Brahmin; the beauty of Christian humility is incompatible with the Vedantic 'arrogance' of the 'I'. As life's goal for the Hindu is realisation of self as God (from a Christian point of view a sin of pride), the wife approaches the husband—and vice versa—not so much as an individual person but as a divine principle: "Not for the sake of his wife, but verily for the sake of the Self in her'. Thus Rama must ask himself: 'Did I love the Self in Madeleine?' His answer—'I knew I did not. I knew I could not love' (p.26)—emotionally pervades the novel.

S. Nagarajan ("An Indian Novel") claims convincingly that the source of this failure of love is cultural and philosophical incompatibility, because for Rama the 'world is not real except in the way that illusions are while they last' (op.cit., pp.512-3), whereas Madeleine 'believes in the actual reality of the world and of the human person'. 'In the marriage of Rama and Madeleine', Nagarajan continues, 'two contrary world-views, two contrary epistemologies, come together, and the novel is a study of that encounter' (p.513). Nagarajan's interpretation of this encounter seems so relevant to an understanding of <u>The Serpent and the Rope</u> that it is worth quoting at some length:

In terms of the definition of India taken up in this novel, man is purusa, the Lord of Creation, and woman is prakrati, the inherent power of purusa whereby the purusa creates. Woman's function is to give herself as prakrati to man as purusa so that man may know that in his true self he is purusa himself. (p.514)

The purusa knows himself only in knowing his power of prakrati. Therefore all denial of womanhood is wrong, whether in the Gandhian-ascetic way or the Western way "in which virginity was lost by too much knowledge and womanhood had lost its rights by forsaking that involved slipping secrecy, that mendicant shyness with which woman hides her truth." In the ideal Indian marriage, husband and wife try to adjust themselves not primarily and directly to each other—that, of course, takes place, though incidentally—but to a dharma which is intended to lead them to the jnanam, the sole reality of the self (atman) and its identity with knowledge and existence. In a modern Western marriage...husband and wife recognise themselves as independent entities and try to adjust themselves to the precise curve of each other's personality. If a maddening sense of personal frustration is the risk in a marriage orientated toward the Indian ideal, unfaithfulness is the risk in a Western one....Madeleine's failure from Rama's point of view consists simply in her dualism, the assertion that purusa and prakrati are separate. (p.515)[13]

13 Cp. C.D. Narasimhaiah, "Raja Rao: The Serpent and the Rope", p.78:

> The failure [of Rama's marriage to Madeleine] is not due to any one cause exclusively, such is Raja Rao's understanding and sympathy. It is not due to the feeble mingling of cultures, though it is there; not due to difference of nationalities ('what fools we are to think the Rhone divided mankind', for the Rhone is sister to Ganga and flowed into her); not due to difference of outlooks and ideals wholly—though all these have contributed, but primarily because true marriage is possible only when the ego is dead and when the duality of life is resolved in the One.

That true marriage is a non-dualistic oneness of 'purusa' and 'prakrati' is confirmed when Savithri farewells Rama, prior to her leaving England; she comes to him in the spirit of Radha, the perfect bride, offering Krishna worship, and touching his feet. Rama tells Savithri: "in marriage both the spouse and the espoused become anointed unto godhead" (p.214). Theirs is a spiritually authentic 'marriage':

> We were not married that morning, we discovered, we had ever been married—else how understand that silent, whole knowledge of one another. (p.215)

'The God of woman must be the God of her man' (p.116): for this reason true marriage was possible between Rama and Savithri but notbetween Rama and Madeleine. Rama's God must be Hindu. Catholicism was in Madeleine's blood. Later on she acquired Buddhism—as a kind of psychic act of will. Through fasting she developed extraordinary powers and the house was visited by apparitions and extra-sensory phenomena. But Buddhism, with its doctrine of compassion for the object, is incompatible with Rama's beliefs. He does not believe in the reality of the object as object. By fasting to cure Rama's tubercular condition, Madeleine dedicated herself to Rama as object. Her Buddhistic consciousness of subject-object relations contradicts his subjective view of reality.

Underlying the novel's triangular complex of personal relationships, then, are: firstly, Raja Rao's

hymn to woman as a power which reveals man as he is, as subject not object; and secondly, the metaphysics of the serpent and rope symbolism. Moreover, these two lines of thought are interconnected in complicated, and perhaps even contradictory, ways.

To Rama woman is a primal universal phenomenon, and individual woman personifies universal aspects of existence. Woman is 'earth' or 'world' and the active principle of life. The Coronation of the English queen prompts an authorial soliloquy, which begins as follows:

> Woman is the earth, air, ether, sound; woman is the microcosm of the mind, the articulations of space, the knowing in knowledge; the woman is fire, movement clear and rapid as the mountain stream; the woman is that which seeks against that which is sought. To Mitra she is Varuna, to Indra she is Agni, to Rama she is Sita, to Krishna she is Radha. Woman is the meaning of the word, the breath, touch, act; woman, that which reminds man of which he is, and reminds herself through him of that which she be. Woman is kingdom, solitude, time; woman is growth, the gods, inherence; the woman is death, for it is through woman that one is born; woman rules, for it is she, the universe. She is the daughter of the earth, the queen, and it is to her that elephant and horse, camel, deer, cow, and peacock bow that she reign on us, as in some medieval Book of Hours where she is clad in the blue of the sky; all the animals and worlds surround her, and praise her that she be. The world was made for celebration, for coronation ...Woman is the duality made for her own pools of mirroring and she crowns herself to show that man is not of this kingdom. Man cannot even die. Then must he absorb himself into himself and be being. The coronation is the adieu of man to the earth. Be gay, earth, be beautiful, for man must go.

> Woman is the world. Woman is the earth and the cavalcade, the curve of the cloud, and the round roundness of the sun. (pp.357-8)

This concept of woman as sovereign earth power and creative force noticeably involves the complementary proposition that man is alien to earth, an idea which echoes an earlier comment in Rama's diary that 'the feminine permanence will grow' but man 'must go' because he 'is a stranger to this earth' (p.148). Man can 'worship woman' and thereby 'redeem the world' (p.176), while woman can enable him to realise that his dharma is to 'absorb himself into himself and be being'.

How, therefore, does the concept of the objective actuality of woman, as defined in the passaged quoted above, correlate with Rama's Vedantin view that reality is self? In considering this question the serpent and rope theme is clearly relevant. Rama tells Madeleine: "Either you believe the world exists and so—you. Or you believe that you exist—and so the world" (p.337). He maintains that there can be only these two attitudes to life and that between them no compromise is possible. The celebrated serpent and the rope passage, from which the novel's title is derived, is Rama's cryptic explanation of his view:

> "The world is either unreal or real—the serpent or the rope. There is no in-between-the-two and all that's in-between is poetry, is sainthood. You might go on saying all the time, "No, no, it's the rope,"

14 Cp. the following remarks in Raja Rao's "Notes to Kanthapura, p.231:

'Vidya and Avidya. Two primary elements of Vedanta, corresponding to Brahman (the Absolute) and Maya (the Illusory)....Vidya means knowledge. In Vedanta there is no evil as such, no ignorance (Avidya), but only the unreal appearance of evil or ignorance, just as unreal as the son of a barren woman, the horns on the head of a hare, or the water seen in a mirage. This does not mean that you do not see the water—you do see it, of course—but when you go near it you find it is a delusion. Thus truth is not the opposite of untruth. Rather, Truth is the background of everything—it is and it is what is. Even the so-called Illusion must be explained in terms of Truth. Illusion, one says, is the basis of pain, duality, etc. When we examine it more closely, however, we see that illusion is only an appearance, just as the wave is thought to be in the ocean, although the ocean is only water. We look at the wave and we call it a wave, but when we take it in our hands it is water and water alone. Vidya is the Knowledge of Reality. But at the same time Knowledge itself is Reality: unless you know, nothing can be. Hence all is Knowledge, all is Vidya; and there never has been and there never can be Avidya or ignorance—horns on the head of a hare.'

Note the close correspondence between this and the serpent and the rope passage: e.g. the sight of the serpent in the evening inspiring 'fear of pain' and 'Illusion...is the basis of pain'; 'there is no serpent, there never was a serpent' and 'there never has been and there never can be Avidya'. It is also interesting to note that Raja Rao prefaces The Serpent and the Rope with the following quotation from Sri Atmananda Guru—'Waves are nothing but water. So is the sea.'—thus emphasising the importance he attaches to the novel's metaphysical theme.

Granted that this passage 'makes sense', in rational or intuitive terms, trying to interpret it is obviously hazardous; and it may well be that the following comments result from looking 'at the rope from the posture of the serpent'. It does seem, though, that Rama is saying that to make the world the index of what is real is to mistake the illusion for reality. What is real is non-dual. The 'rope just is'. It is not the opposite of the serpent because it cannot be in any sense a function of what is not real. That—like the notion 'opposite'—implies duality. Hence 'there never was a serpent'. The world is therefore a world of appearances. To attempt to see reality from the posture of illusion, to look up to heaven with the world's eyes, is to mistake poetic or saintly appearances ('paradise, saints, avatars, gods, heroes, universes') for reality, for the rope. Such, then, is the philosophical basis of the theme, in The Serpent and the Rope, that Paradise and Absolute Truth are irreconcileable. 'Beauty is not Truth, though it may be a way of attempting to see Truth', is an implied proposition. And moreover, as was shown in an earlier discussion, Paradise and Beauty imply Woman.

Now, when the serpent and the rope passage is examined alongside the eulogy to woman quoted earlier, there arises an apparent contradiction between the concrete actuality of woman as life-force, as daughter of earth, and the philosophical contention that the

world is in fact nebulous or unreal. Perhaps it follows, therefore, that Raja Rao's idealisation of Woman pertains to poetry, sainthood and paradise rather than to Truth. Thus the poetic passionate affirmation of Woman at the same time implies her annihilation as a separate entity: in performing her feminine functions, and in revealing man's selfhood to himself, she makes known the spiritual necessity or fate whereby her dissolution and that of the world is inevitable if reality is in fact non-dual as Rama believes. That, moreover, constitutes her ideal fulfilment. The sexual act is a parable of all this.

That the view of life underlying The Serpent and and Rope is dependent on such arguments seems evident from the following key passage:

> The woman needs our worship for her fulfilment, for in worshipping her we know the world and annihilate it, absorbing it into ourself. We should be Shiva that woman be dissolved—and with her the world. For the world is meant not for denial but for dissolution. The object, I said to myself, is woman. Hence the concupiscence of ascetics for their loin-cloth, their Kamandala, their stick, or naked feet. (p.174)

To deny woman, therefore, is unnatural. Accordingly, the apparent trait of denial and withdrawal in Rama's character—in fact he once refers to himself as a prude (p.25)—does not mean that at the end of the novel he chooses an ascetic future because of a puritanical aversion to life or sex. His affair in Bombay with his host's

neglected wife is proof of the normality of Rama's appetites. Woman gave Rama the knowledge of himself: The Bombay woman carnally, Little Mother maternally and familially, Savithri spiritually and ritualistically in the Hindu sense of marriage, Madeleine sacrificially in the Christian sense and compassionately in the Buddhistic sense. At the conclusion of The Serpent and the Rope that knowledge amounts to the realisation that what he needs is 'not a God but a Guru' and that the Guru will enable him to know the 'formless form of Truth' which 'walks without walking, speaks without talking, moves without gesticulating, shows without naming, reveals what is known' (p.408). (This is also T.S. Eliot's position in Four Quartets.) Rama also realises that he has already been taken to such a truth and become a disciple, because his Brahminical fulfilment of spiritual destiny did not begin with his present incarnation as Rama but in the ancestral past of mystical being. Time past is time present is time future:

'This happened, this happened so long ago—Oh, as long ago as I have known myself be. Ever since being has known itself as being I have Known It. It is the gift that Yagnyavalkya made to Maiteryi, it is the gift Govinda made to Sri Sankara. It is the gift He made to me, my Lord. May I be worthy of the Lord. Lord, My Master! O though abode of Truth.' (p.408)

Moreover, he has also discovered that his Guru exists in present time and place; he knows where he must go:

For now I know the name of Him to whom I have to go, though I have always known Him without knowing His name. So to Travancore I will go, I tell Vera... (p.409)

Vera is the baby daughter of Georges and Catherine, and it is significant that, before announcing his decision to Vera, he tells the reader 'I...speak to her my truth' (p.409).

In view of the above facts it is difficult to understand how Ahmed Ali can interpret the novel so differently. Quoting the last words of the novel—'And we went back to the plush chairs. The chocolate was very good' (p.411)—Ali comments:

...the ending note tempers the spiritual aspirations by social necessity...the epic form which the narrative has maintained to a remarkable degree, and the metaphysical content, find a much needed rest in the conclusion that the Illusion must pause in Reality, a world full of chocolate and small talk that fill the dominating atmosphere of a West from which Ramaswamy ...has no longer any desire to return, not even to the Guru, the teacher, the knower of the path and saviour —in short, to salvation.[15]

What Ali neglects to point out is that the chocolate drinking (Rama did not take alcohol) is a toast to Rama's new life, and the novelist's toast to his work and vision. Here is how the novel really ends:

15 "Illusion and Reality: The Art and Philosophy of Raja Rao", p.19.

"I have been telling you and myself a lie all these years. My real home is in Travancore. Benares is there..."

"I will make chocolate for two in Travancore, Travancore, Travancore, there's magic in that name!" said Catherine.

And we went back to the plush chairs. The chocolate was very good. (p.411)

In conclusion, it is well to remember that while The Serpent and the Rope is a modern, even avant garde, novel and dispenses with such traditional fictional criteria as plot, exploit and complicated character conflict and interaction, the novel is steeped in a highly-evolved tradition. No British novel, in fact, could be so comparably traditional. As we have seen, Raja Rao's philosophy of life is essentially Vedantic. Further, the central symbolism of the novel, the serpent as illusion and the rope as reality, derives its strength from the fact that it has been current in the Indian mind for such a long time. Examples of the symbolic value of the serpent and rope image are to be found in various religious and philosophical texts; one instance is Viveka-Cudamani or Crest-Jewel of Wisdom by Sri Samkaracarya.[16] Indeed, to read Crest-Jewel of Wisdom alongside The Serpent and the Rope provides for the Western reader an insight into the degree to which Raja Rao's novel is a sophisticated interpretation of the

16 I am indebted to Lindsey Burridge for drawing my attention to the serpent and rope symbolism in Crest-Jewel of Wisdom.

Hindu view of life. Sri Sankaracarya maintains, as does Raja Rao, that there is no relation between object and subject except through illusion, and he examines the problem of discriminating between the real and the unreal in terms of the serpent-rope analogy, for example:

...absence of discrimination springs forth the notion of rope in the snake.
...the illusion of the serpent in the rope is destroyed by the realization of the rope.[17]

Similarly, The Serpent and the Rope draws upon the traditional resources of language, Sanscrit particularly, but in ways which are difficult for the foreign sensibility to define accurately. To what extent Raja Rao's English is permeated by an instinctive feeling for Sanscrit remains a matter of conjecture: that he felt the Sanscrit verses quoted in The Serpent and the Rope indispensable to the portrayal of Rama's sensibility indicates the strength of indigenous non-English influences on his writing. But in being conscious of such cultural barriers to deep understanding, the reader is in fact participating in one of the novel's important themes in an unusually direct and personal sense. The different instinctive patterns of

17 Sri Samkaracarya, Viveka-Cudamani or Crest-Jewel of Wisdom (translated by Mohini M. Chatterji), Adyar, The Theosophical Publishing House, 1947, pp.57,46.

personality underlying Rama's relationship with Madeleine provides the main example of this theme. Here is a case in point, recorded in Rama's diary:

'...Catholicism is in her blood. Not all Georges's fervour can give him the instinct—and religion is an instinct that gives illumination to a line, a reference. Just the same way when she talks of Buddhism I feel the word dukka almost with the entrails dropping into my hand, whereas for her it is mere sorrow. Dukka is the very tragedy of creation, the sorrow of the sorrow that sorrow is.' (p.82)

The 'recovery of a traditional understanding' (to borrow Balachandra Rajan's phrase concerning Eliot) is Rama's most significant attainment, and is one of the reasons why The Serpent and the Rope is such a backward-looking experimental novel.

Raja Rao's most recent novel, The Cat and Shakespeare, is in some ways a philosophical sequel to The Serpent and the Rope, providing questions and answers concerning the nature of life, death, love, self, time, eternity, reality and illusion. Ramakrishna Pai is a happier, partly comic Rama. The Cat and Shakespeare is set in Travancore, which at the end of The Serpent and the Rope Rama realised was his spiritual home, and it is tempting to see Govindian Nair of the later novel as a somewhat whimsical materialisation of Rama's Guru-to-be. Govindian Nair is a senior clerk in a ration shop. He is also Ramakrishna's friend and neighbour. In both regards his compassion and wisdom mark him out as a rare personality who possesses the qualities of a Guru.

Ramakrishna says of him: 'to him all the world is just what he does' (p.8) and 'Govindan Nair is my guide' (p.62). Govindan Nair regards the mother cat, which one of his colleagues gave him as a joke, as a sacred being signifying the maternal principle. Hence the Cat of the novel's title. (The Shakespeare of the title relates to the numerous Shakespeare parallels Raja Rao introduces.[18]) As Guru, Govindan Nair teaches Ramakrishna the meaning of life through the way of the Cat:

> He [Nair] does and so the world comes into being. He himself calls it: "The kitten is being carried by the cat. We would all be kittens carried by the cat. Some, who are lucky...will one day know it. Others live hearing 'meow-meow.'"..."I like being the kitten. And how about you, sir?" he would say. (p.8)

In his conversations with Ramakrishna, Govindan Nair comments on various metaphysical questions pertaining to the search for Truth. Ramakrishna is bewildered by 'Govindan Nair's twists of passage and of though which take you through fearful twists and trysts and imponderables, to some majesty' (p.12). However, it is not long before Ramakrishna becomes an accomplished disciple who reels off dazzling paradoxes and chinese-box sequences of terms, for example:

18 For an elucidation of these parallels see C.D. Narasimhaiah, "Raja Rao: The Cat and Shakespeare", The Literary Criterion, Vol.VIII No.3 Winter 1968, pp.65-95.

It was as if Govindan Nair was there when he was not there but yet he was truly there: one can be and not be but be, and where one is one cannot be seen, for light cannot see light and much less can light see the sun. (p.16)

Two aspects of Ramakrishna's search for Truth soon become apparent: firstly, that reason and logic are inadequate aids to understanding when confronted by life's contradictions; secondly, that wifehood is the most holy state in the world:

I have a system of no logic, and that is the story. What logic can speak of Usha?[19] How and what shall I say about Shantha? She lives backward, as it were, when, with her rounded belly, she moves forward. Birth is instantaneous with time. Who is born where? Time is born in time. To be a wife is not to be wed. To be a wife is to worship your man. Then you are born. And you give birth to what is born in being born. You annihilate time and you become a wife. Wifehood, of all states in the world, seems the most holy. It stops work. It creates. It lives on even when time dies. Suppose you broke your clock, would the garden go? Suppose the garden were burned, where will the sky go? Such is woman. (p.30)

Logic is inadequate for understanding woman as the expression of a cosmic life-giving principle which gives birth to time, annihilates time and survives

19 Ramakrishna's daughter by his wife.

time, time being the illusory device whereby cycles, or re-incarnations, of existence are measured according to their mortal duration. The child, not yet having been conditioned into the methodology of logic, has a power of intuitive understanding which the adult lacks. Ramakrishna is aware of this power in Usha, and the novel concludes with him asking her "Does one see sleep, Usha?" and her answering "Seeing is sleep" (p.117).

This notion that the condition of life is sleep, the slumber of Maya, relates to Raja Rao's Eliot or Joyce-like application of a Shakespearian theme and in particular of certain lines from Hamlet as well as aspects of Hamlet's character. In some respects the Hamlet analogy is inverted. Thus, while Hamlet's idealisation of woman corresponds to Ramakrishna's, Hamlet's bitter denigration of woman does not; and while Hamlet speculates about the supernatural ('reality' in Raja Rao's terminology), his superstitious dread is quite different from Govindan Nair's metaphysical calm. Like Ramakrishna's 'system of no logic', Hamlet's madness has method in it: his madness was to defeat logic with the logic of paradox. His madness was to be a metaphysician instead of a prince.

Hamlet's speech 'I have of late...lost all my mirth...What a piece of work is a man!...this quin-

tessence of dust' etc. (Act II Scene ii) is paralleled in Govindan Nair's speech:

"...Don't you believe you exist, even though you know you will die? How do you say that, Mister? When you know this rotten fat thing, with pus, blood, excreta, with semen for procreation, and bile for digestion...the blood that oozes to the heart and the urine that is thrown out—this filthy sack of the five elements, what does it become? It stinks, sir, it stinks when it is laid on fire....It's a half-corrupt, half-burned thing purring with many fluids. "Chee-chee!" This body. And this mind, with its encaged gramophone record, another His Master's Voice, and all it needs is a white dog listening to its music....whether you sing a cinema song or you sing a hymn to Shiva, the box is just the same, only the needle talks to the record. Who made the record? Eventually you made it...so you are the cause of the song. Now sing, Man:

I am empty as a tamarind seed,
The lord plays the square and four with me...."

(pp.95-6)

The main difference between Hamlet and Govindan Nair, however, is that the latter does not succumb to morbidity and pessimism, the chief reason for this being that Nair simply accepts the biological and psychological conditions of life as they are because he believes that life is merely the appearance (or sleep) in which the play of reality is dreamily discernible.

Thus we come to the essence of Govindan Nair's Hamlet speech, in which he employs the prison image and the play concept to demonstrate the metaphysical nature of reality:

"...When you are reminded that you are empty as a tamarind seed...begin to think of the play. And where play begins, reality begins. Reality is only where you go to prison and say, close the door and open the door. Any door can open and any door can close. What is special about a prison door that you call it a prison door? In dream you must have gone to a house from which you could not escape....On waking... You say, I played in the dream...." (p.96)

Reality is reality, not the concept of reality: hence there is nothing 'special about a prison door that you call it a prison door'. Prison is only in the mind. Thus, following Govindan Nair's bizarre trial when he was falsely accused of bribery, Ramakrishna comes to realise that Nair 'never went to prison':

When you see the stone of the wall, and stone alone remains, you have no prison. If I say you are and just see you, you are not <u>there</u>. If I go on seeing a point, I become the point. So the prison vanished. And I understood the ration shop scale where children played...Life is so precious. I ask you why does not one play? (p.114)

It is a mistake to think that what you see is necessarily real, particularly if what you think you see is a predetermined concept of what you think you will see. What you take to be what you see may well be illusory.

On the other hand, Raja Rao implies, if seeing is a spontaneous and innocent function of play—as is the case with children and kittens—then it may be

possible to experience intimations of reality. Though, most people, and adults in particular, are reluctant to play. One is reminded, here, of a moment in Eliot's rose garden:

> Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,
> Hidden, excitedly, containing laughter.
> Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
> Cannot bear very much reality. ("Burnt Norton", I, 40-3)

Inssimilar vein the headmaster in R.K. Narayan's Grateful to Life and Death says that children "are the real gods on earth" (p.153) and that adults have much to learn from them, especially the "meaning of the word joy—in its purest sense" (p.141); Susila says children "see the souls of persons" (p.135). Usha saw the soul of Shridhar (Govindan Nair's son) just before his death.

Govindan Nair's parody of Hamlet't 'To be or not to be' soliloquy, and his subsequent commentary on Shakespeare, relates the reality quest—'man in his journey to the ultimate' (p.78)—to the 'sleep: perchance to dream' question that tortures Hamlet. Nair infers that dream and sleep and waking are conditions of existence which make man aware of the mystery of life:

> We slip, sir, from sleep to wake from wake to sleep. We marry the wife in dream, and we wake up king of Denmark. We marry Ophelia in dream and wake up having a Polonius to bury. We live in continual mystery. (pp.81-2).

All metaphysical argument, then, must end up acknowledging the mystery of life, and it is in this regard that The Cat and Shakespeare is a weirdly effective poetic statement. The novel reads like a dream in words, and it is likely that Raja Rao conceived his 'Tale of India'[20] accordingly. Most of the action is fragmented and bizarre, as in dreams: consider, for example, Ramakrishna's visit to the doctor's surgery (which turns out to be a brothel) where he meets the naked lady with beautiful golden breasts; or the incredible Court-room scene which is dominated by Govindan Nair's witty sensible nonsense and the cat's cleverness. The comedy is often the result of a dream-like surrealistic chain of associations, and Raja Rao's mysticism of the word. In this, as well as other senses, Raja Rao is a kind of Indian James Joyce. Kanthapura is Raja Rao's Portrait of the Artist, The Serpent and the Rope his Ulysses, and The Cat and Shakespeare his Finnegans Wake. The parallels are numerous and interesting. The cunning, silence and exile which filled the twenty-two year interval between Raja Rao's first and second novels were profoundly rewarding.

In language, style, theme and formal ingenuity Raja Rao's novels comprise an achievement which cannot easily be placed in sure perspective but which, in terms of the development of the Indian novel, is clearly significant as well as impressive. Interpretation and evaluation of

20 The sub-title of The Cat and Shakespeare.

his work involves the use of techniques of criticism which pertain not only to the novel but also to poetry; this of course further adds to the difficulties confronting the reader already at a cultural remove from Raja Rao's psychological and physical environment. However, his central themes—life seen as a complex combination of appearance and reality and the sensuous mystery of Woman, in particular—and his development of these themes, have an undeniable universal relevance. As such Raja Rao is indeed 'a companion of pilgrimage'.

VI TOWARDS CONCLUSIONS

The contemporary literary scene in India gives every impression of being in a state of ferment and flux. There are signs, both in the vernacular languages and in English, that a modern Indian literature has emerged and continues to expand. Central to this emergence is the growth of fiction and in the mainstream of this growth is the English-language novel. R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao are novelists of real stature and originality, while the number of interesting and competently-written novels in English is encouragingly high in view of the short period of time—the last twenty years—during which the bulk of Indian fiction in English has been published. At the moment it is not possible to predict which young writers, or how many, will produce work equal to, or better than, the best which has already emerged. But there seems little doubt that the Indian novel in English will grow and mature as a branch of Indian literature. An allied literary development is foreseeable for Pakistan where young novelists are now beginning to gain recognition and encouragement.

Of the Indian younger novelists not so far discussed in the present study, Anita Desai is perhaps the best known. Apart from short stories, she has published two novels, Cry, The Peacock (1963) and Voices in the City (1965). Cry, The Peacock is a moderately successful first novel which marks the author as a writer of some promise. In Cry, The Peacock, though, Anita Desai is perhaps too transparently indebted to Virginia Woolf and other exponents of such introspective techniques of the modern novel as stream of consciousness. Prominent among these techniques—displayed like a peacock tail—are a mannered use of language and a penchant for sensuous imagery. Through the heightened and taut perceptions of the central character and main narrator (Maya), the author presents the brute beauty of landscape, sky scenes, flowers, fruits, birds, ornaments and facial expressions in a neurotically exhausting combination of close-ups. The exhibitionistic character of the style, however, cannot be attributed entirely to the psychological condition of the narrator who, during the course of the novel, becomes insane. On quite a few pages the author is seen to be striving for literary effect with the result that her writing tends to be forced precisely at points where restraint and lyrical understatement might have been more appropriate.

As an example of the stresses and strains to be found in Anita Desai's style, consider the following passage:

...while I held my soul, still burning, in my hands, I saw my body detach itself from it and float away, to rest upon the dim mirror where I could gaze upon it from a cool distance. I studied it, absorbed: the round, childish face, pretty, plump and pampered, its smooth, silken skin with one, small velvet mole; the small, shell-like ears curling around pretty ignorance; the soft, over-full lips arched with vulnerable sweetness; the long, curled lashes and the very heavy, very dark black brows; the silly collection of curls, a flower pinned to them—a pink flower, a child's choice of a posy. One might think it a lovable face. But it was not the face that a man like Gautama[1] could love. He might be charmed by it, momentarily, diverted by it, for a while, but to capture him in entirety, if a fleshly face could do it, it would have to be a finer one, the elongated, etiolated one of an intellectual, refined by thought and reflection, bereft of the weakness of impulses, aloof from coarseness and freshness. This I told myself in calm, still words, and I gazed long at each feature of the image before me, so like a painting on a chocolate box, and hated it fiercely. Hate was a new emotion to me, and, in trespassing upon it, I entered a new vista of knowledge. I forced myself into believing that I could see now what must be the reason for my hating it so, for Gautama's spurning it —visible to our subconscious only.[2]

Allowing for the fact that an overwrought style serves to mirror the overwraught condition of the narrator, Anita Desai's writing nevertheless tends to be too self-

1 Maya's husband.
2 Cry, The Peacock, Peter Owen, 1963, p.91.

consciously explicit, the imagery to be too overloaded, the meaning to be too obviously spelt out.

The Indian element in Cry, The Peacock is intervolved with the treatment of such standard contemporary themes as the sexual malaise, the oedipal complex, and the trauma of childhood. Maya has been motherless for at least as long as she can remember, though the novelist does not seem to know why. On the other hand it is definitely suggested that Maya's psychotic state is the result of an excessive dependence on her father (Gautama is explicitly referred to as a father substitute) and an obsession with fate that has resulted from a childhood visit to an albino astrologer who predicted that after four years of marriage either she or her husband would die. Her disease takes the form of a death-wish (an unconscious compulsion to make life conform to fate) which she displaces quite effectively at the last minute by murdering her husband in a fit of madness. This accomplished Maya reverts to childhood —off stage in the last chapter of the novel. Maya's sexual abnormality is revealed through the sado-masochistic peacock symbolism, whereby the sex act is identified with the dance of death:

> Before they mate, they fight. They will rip each other's breasts to strips and fall, bleeding, with their beaks open and panting. When they have exhausted themselves in battle, they will mate. (p.82).

Cry, The Peacock, then, is psychological melodrama, though it lacks Poe's 'gothic splendour' of exaggerated crudity and James's Turn of the Screw sophistication. The Indian fatalistic theme is confidently worked out, though Gautama's rhetorical pronouncements on the Gita, on the virtue of detachment and the foolishness of attachment, are not convincingly presented and indicate a conscientious intrusion of Indian identity into a novel conceived mainly according to fashionable Western literary formulae.

The relevance of Anita Desai to the present discussion, to the attempt to view Indian fiction in English in tentative perspective, is that Cry, The Peacock exemplifies the inevitable tendency in a younger talent who possesses verbal facility to produce work in a currently vogue mould. However, whatever new direction the Indian novel may be about to take, vogue influences of some kind are bound to be discernible. Perhaps the most influential 'influence' on Indian writers of the last thirty years has been T.S. Eliot, so much so that Eliot's poetry can even be said to have contributed to the atmosphere of certain novels, Balachandra Rajan's The Dark Dancer and Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column especially.

Although the vernacular Indian novel forms no part of the present study, any general comment concerning the literary sophistication of the Indian novel must take into account the fact that fictional experimentation

and development are not the sole prerogatives of any one Indian language. No Indian novel written originally in English, apart from Raja Rao's Kanthapura, has dealt with the folk theme so evocatively as has Thakazhi Pillai's Chemmeen, recently translated into English, which is about life in a Kerala fishing community. Then, to take a different example or comparison, Satinath Bhaduri's Bengali Independence novel The Vigil is, in translation, more technically sophisticated than most political English-language novels. In its four-part structure, change of narrators and use of flash-backs and stream of consciousness, The Vigil recalls Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury. Four members of the same family, three in jail and one outside, in turn contemplate life and their inter-locked fates. 'The novelty of this form', Lila Ray comments, 'makes The Vigil, in the opinion of many, the most vivid of the novels written around' the August Revolution of 1942.[3]

So far as experimentation in the Indian novel in English is concerned, Raja Rao has made the most conspicuous contributions. G.V. Desani's All About Mr. Hatterr (1948), however, merits consideration at this point. Admirers of this novel, among them Khushwant Singh, claim that in it Desani displays a Joycean linguistic originality. Desani's forte is comic

3 Introduction to The Vigil, Asia Publishing House, 1965, p.viii.

dialect. Hatterr, the narrator and main character, relates the history of his Indian misadventures in an exaggerated Anglo-Indian speech which is often more British than the British, but is spiced with Indian twists of phrase, word inventions and spelling peculiarities. Here are two examples:

> Indian kiddies, Hindu tots, Moslim cubs, were riding on roundabouts, some mounted on papier mache horses, laughing and shouting; others, on a centrifugal Chairoplane, swinging round and round, dingle-dangle, till the urchins were a'most, a'most horizontal, instead of vertical!...
>
> It was a dam' fine day: and the atmosphere, warm champagne sun, oh, absolutely belles-lettres!
>
> The earth was blotto with the growth of willow, peach, mango-blossom, and flower. Every ugly thing, and smell, was ~~in ricognito~~ incognito, as fragrance and freshness.
>
> Being prone, this typical spring-time dash and vivacity, played an exulting phantasmagoria note on the inner-man. Medically speaking the happy circumstances vibrated my ductless glands, and fused into me a wibble-wobble Whoa, Jamieson! fillip-and-flair to live, live!
>
> ...all in a huff, I suffered an overpowering Hereford and Angus bull-power impulse, Now or never![4]
>
> Damme, almost said to the feller, in his own tone and lexicon, "Same to you! Blaw, blaw! Appadine-Sinclair! Huntin' and shootin'! Good show! Good show! Ain't cricket, Featherstonehaugh! Play the game, Cholmeley-Smythe! A century, old bean! You are a Briton, sir! A sahib and a bwana, bay Jove! Fore, there, fore! O mother! O begetter! O jewel! O bearer of the pain of child-birth! May Appadine-Sinclair's arteries be stolen for turning up at this inauspicious moment!" (p.213)

4 All About Mr. Hatterr, Aldor, 1948, pp.19-20.

Desani's verbal trickery consists in the main of parody, pun, outrageous proper names, epigrammatic witticisms and theatrical gestures. In his introduction to the novel Desani uses such expressions as 'subconsciously aberrationed' and 'by Ganesha' (p.10); he invents such characters as Betty Bloomsbohemia, 'the Virtuosa with knobs-on' (p.6), Priss Prigg Pilliwinks and the Loganberry-face; Hatterr sometimes thinks aloud in what he calls a 'boozalogue soliloquy' (p.34) and invents such puns as 'sexploitation' (p.73), 'sexaltation' (p.144) and 'sinfant' (p.78).

Underlying Desani's use of language are a few jocular literary principles which get stated during the bizarre course of the narrative. The first amounts to a belief in art as calculated deception. Desani's introduction to the novel begins with the following admission:

> DURING '39-'45, these warring years, an appalling thing happened to me. I acquired a major Fault. I became secretive, told lies, at any rate, rarely the whole truth. Life seemed so many clashes and contests, sorry! and, well, Invention helps.
>
> ...
>
> Mimic me Truth successfully (that's to say, lie to me and achieve belief) and I'd credit you with Art, Skill, Imagination, and intimate intelligence of Truth. (p.3)

If art, skill and imagination are to be interpreted in the light of <u>All About Mr. Hatterr</u> then wilful distortion

and exaggeration, as well as the Coleridgean 'willing suspension of disbelief', are indispensable to whatever truthfulness Desani's crazy fantasy has to offer.

Concerning the relationship of words to truth, comedy is the art of lying, Desani implies on the basis of what he considers to be a very good philosophical case; namely, that language is an imperfect transmitter:

> All words are pointers, indicators, symbols; and, there isn't a single word in any lingo, dialect or doggerel, which is absolutely cast-true: suggesting in the exact infallible, Truth.
>
> ...
>
> A Truth-thing, or a Truth-idea, might be an a. By the time a feller has the notion of this a, a sensation of it, its nature changes. What a feller has is not an a at all, but an awareness of an a.
>
> Below the belt! He hasn't the true a, but a translation!
>
> Now, if a feller has to communicate his-own idea and awareness of this a—let's name it another a—to some feller, he has to use a word, a pointer, a shadowgraph, which might be a b. The message is a (Truth), plus a (the notion of Truth) plus b (a word): baa. In other words, if a feller wants to tell another what Truth-a is like, he has to aa and baa!
>
> All communicated and communicable knowledge is subject to this bashing up: this Thus far, and no farther, you blighters! ruling. (p.236)

Desani, of course, writes comic 'dialect or doggerel' in which words are 'pointers, indicators, symbols' of absurdity and incongruity. The above passage also serves to illustrate the intellectual humour and parody which is part of his apparatus of wit.

The principle of Invention in All About Mr. Hatterr is also evident in the following mannerist styles.

(1) Parody of Indian poetic hyperbole, romantic rhetoric, and superabundance of similes:

"Her nails matching a red Malayan sunset, the lobes of her ears as sweet as Kulu peaches! Her ankles as nimble as those of a fawn's! Her face as wistful as that of a babe! Mother, O mother, hearken! the parting of her hair as straight as the road to Mandalay, her walk as graceful as that of an amorous peacock's, her anklets-adorned feet as musical as gold-and-pearl temple bells! Her face as tender as a lotus! Her lips enshaming molten gold! Her toes like jasmine-petals!" (p.209)

(2) The Joycean-Shakespearian hotch-potch speech of Bannerji, Hatterr's friend, counsellor, confidant and admirer:

"Iago," says the feller, greatly agitated, "I am as meek as Moses, but I have just heard that you have been mishandled by that Bhata Govinda. Whip me, ye devils! Roast me in sulphur! Gall, worse than gall! A rascally yea-forsooth knave! Three Judases, each one thrice worse than Judas! Falstaff speaking, I am as subject to heat as butter. A man of continuous dissolution and thaw! What valour were it, when a cur doth grin! If I can but catch him once upon the hip, I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him!" (p.159)

(3) Surrealist word sketches, as in Hatterr's dream about a Symphony Concert in the Albert Hall where Tchaikovsky was conducting 'Nut-crackers', 'Workers of the world unite' (p.84) and other works:

But soon after I had submitted a medico-philosophical Presumption to my consort, in the words, "Dear lady, all apparent opposites and approximates are mere manifestations, somewhere certain to converge," offered her a cigar, and was about to light it for her, I felt someone persist in scratching me on the neck!

At first, I tried to ignore this incidence.

Then I turned back, with as much composure as demanded of me by the solemn occasion.

And, sitting in the seat immediately behind me, in the third row, who do you think?

Rialto!

My friar-in-law, the waxed Kiss-cur)'s brother!

He was wearing a flat starched towel on his head, the anti-Pompadour effect, and leading towards me, he said, "Oi, you, H. Hatterr! Don't go to Mysore! Don't, you bloody fool, don't!"

Damme, did you ever! (p.85)

As a comic novel, then, All About Mr. Hatterr depends for its main effect on Desani's linguistic precocity and whimsicality. The novel's sub-title, A Gesture, and the prefatory description of the work as an autobiography which is a 'MOSAIC-ORGANON' of Life's 'CONTRAST' and 'HUMAN HORSE-PLAY' (p.11), hint at the main quality of Desani's comedy. 'I seek a clown's abandon', Hatterr tells the reader (p.22). The action consists of a series of farcical 'gestures', 'little panto-comedies' (p.17), involving the central character's unhappy but philosophically instructive misadventures with various bogus holy men, a touring English circus, a Mysore confidence man, a magniloquent poet called the Roarer, and so on. Hatterr is the inadvertent victim or 'sucker'

who falls into the clutches of unscrupulous and intimidating people. Invariably, though, he is saved by his native cheerfulness and his strong sense of self-preservation. Both the episodes and the style in which they are narrated brand All About Mr. Hatterr as fiction of the absurd; the novel anticipates Goon humour by about five years. The following segment could be described aptly as 'Goonish':

> Meanwhile, I heard a knock at the door.
> Queer, but my heart thumped like hell!
> I was taking the tonic glycero-phosphates those days.
> Poor state of nerves, and I used to get startled at the least hammering.
> I opened the door, with a self-protective spanner ready in hand, prepared for what come.
> My fears changed into welcome vapours of mirth when I saw the chap.
> "Hullo, hullo, hullo!" I said, laughing from sheer emotional relief. "Damma, Bannerrji, glad to see you! I was indulging in morbid thoughts. Hell of an ennui. Come in. Right inside the ma maison. What's the idea of the gay colour?"
> "You see, Mr. H. Hatterr," replied the feller, "at present, it is spring in India. Being poetically-inclined, I wear saffron-dyed clothes to honour the festive occasion. Also, as you perceive, I wear a twig of the basil in my country cap. It is vanity. But I came to see you about another matter."
> "What matter, Bannerrji? I'd do anything to oblige. As you say, it is spring. I have lost my antique-furniture renovating job. Been fired. Irish promotion. Hail to the gods in the bush, and those without! The Kiss-curl has absquatulated. Parly voo la France, chum? C'est la guerre, n'iss'pa! She has left me, Bannerrji." (p.46)

In a similar comic vein are the bizarre adventures themselves. On one occasion—Hatterr's first and last assignment as a reporter—he is duped by a bogus holy man into divesting himself of his clothes. He reports back to his editor without the story and naked except for a railway-towel loin cloth. Hatterr discovers seven other reporters had been sacked under identical circumstances. It transpires that the holy man and his disciple run a thriving second-hand clothes business. On another occasion Hatterr is duped by an English couple into taking part in a lion-taming act. The woman baits him with lustful promises and he becomes the 'human plate' in an act in which a hungry lion eats a huge steak off Hatterr's bare chest. Later on in the narrative, however, the episodes become somewhat tiresome and repetitive.

The most serious intentions undertaken by Desani in the novel seem to have been to show that the main quality of life is contrast—

> Life is no one way pattern. It's contrasts all the way. And contrasts by Law! (p.236)

—and that one of the most fascinating contrasts in the world is that between East and West. Thus Hatterr, a Eurasian who has lived both in India and England, is himself the novel's main demonstration or embodiment of contrast, somewhat like Baw Saw, the 'love-brat' who was 'a mixed Oriental-Occidental sinfant' (p.78).

Hatterr can see India and its absurdity through western eyes, and England and its absurdity through Indian eyes. Thus, whereas 'All improbables are probable in India' (p.14), Liverpool ('Damma') is 'as unexpected a hole as I ever unexpected' (p.21); whereas Indian mysticism is a front for commercial exploitation, occidental neckwear is the 'mystic symbol of Englishmen—'Their system of mysticism is called Etiquette' (p.81). But All About Mr. Hatterr is only incidentally in the social comment tradition. There is no other Indian novel in English like it, and for this reason alone it has been enjoyed and admired. Desani's novel, unlike his mystically-ambitious poetic drama Hali, is virile good fun.

Another novel which is also remarkable for its uniqueness is The Little Black Box by Shakuntala Shrinagesh. Although the characters and setting are Indian, The Little Black Box has more affinity with the European and American literature of family disintegration (Ibsen, Strindberg, O'Neill, Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller) than with the Indian novel. Although the story is written in the form of a first-person confessional novel and is concluded by a series of letters written by the niece of the narrator, the action might just as well have been presented in the form of a play. The action is mainly confined to the hospital bedroom of the narrator, Sarala, who is dying. She is wealthy and still quite young. Members of her family gather

round but their main interest is the little black box under the bed; the box contains Sarala's private papers and the secret details concerning her financial affairs. Sarala is the centre of the family quarrelling which ensues and of various recriminations. The moral significance of her narrative or confession lies in her attempt to come to terms with the guilt she feels concerning her father who died in a car accident before he could make a new will disinheriting her. She seeks absolution for having betrayed her father and finds it to some degree when she is reunited with her niece, Nimi, whom she had loved and cared for when Nimi was a small child. Sarala leaves her money to Nimi but Nimi destroys the will thus ensuring the validity of an earlier will in which Sarala bequeathed her fortune to the hospital. Nimi comments: 'I know she wanted to give me the money but I don't think she'd have forgiven me if I had taken it'.[5] In this way the curse of family hate and tainted money is finally laid to rest. The Little Black Box is impressive mainly for the psychological intensity with which the death-bed drama is played out. In its presentation of the theme of guilt the novel would appear to belong more with the western literary tradition than in the Indian traditions of literature.

5 The Little Black Box, Secker & Warburg, 1955, p.202.

There remains one novelist, however, who, though he was alienated from India, is an authentic product of the Indian literary imagination. The novelist is Sudhin N. Ghose whose quartet And Gazelles Leaping (1949), Cradle of the Clouds (1951), The Vermilion Boat (1953) and The Flame of the Forest (1955) comprise an achievement which deserves more critical attention than there is space for in the present study. Examined in relation to the main developments which have occurred in Indian fiction in English, Ghose's novels belong, if anywhere, with those novels which explore traditional Indian themes. Ghose's quartet traces the picaresque and romantic adventures of the protagonist from the time of his childhood in a village on the outskirts of Calcutta (And Gazelles Leaping) and his boyhood in the countryside (Cradle of the Clouds), up until his early manhood (The Vermilion Boat, The Flame of the Forest) when he lives mainly in Calcutta from which city he is politically exiled at the end of the last book. The two main traditional elements in these novels are the hero's predisposition to interpret reality in mythological terms and his romantic quest for the ideal. The central goal of this quest is spiritual and sexual union with woman as muse and goddess. Cradle of the Clouds is virtually an anthropological prose-poem about the peasant way of life. In this novel Ghose evokes the peasant's experience of the vicissitudes

of nature and shows how the peasant culture is an expression of this experience and derives its strength, homogeneity and poetry from fertility myths and the Ploughing Ceremony.

Probably Sudhin Ghose is seen at his best in The Flame of the Forest, which is the most versatile of the four novels. The Flame of the Forest is a bizarre blend of satire and fantasy. Ghose satirises various aspects of Calcutta life: political corruption, the pretentiousness of city women, bogus academics, the attempt to graft American ideas of progress and enlightenment onto Indian patterns of life, cow worship (the cow-worshippers, comments to the narrator, 'overlooked the fact that the Vedic deity Indra was a champion beefeater'[6]), and gurus 'who ride only in Rolls-Royces and charge heavy fees for giving spiritual guidance' which 'degenerates into instructions about stock exchange speculations' (p.171). Although the narrator is an incorrigible romancer, there is also something of the serious-minded Stephen Dedalus in him as well. But Ghose's India, "this intermingling of the divine and the mundane" (p.264), is a place where cynicism can be transcended by spiritual optimism.

6 The Flame of the Forest, Michael Joseph, 1955, p.169.

The following passage from The Flame of the Forest provides a key to the quartet as a whole, indicating both the traditional bias of Ghose's sensibility and the traditional direction of the protagonist's quest:

One of the greatest pleasures of coming to a place like the Kala Bhairab temple was, for me, the impromptu discourses of its frequenters....I was sick of listening to shibboleths on progress among the so-called educated, the town-dwellers who listened to the wireless, read newspapers and pretended universal knowledge. But in the temple-yards and on the steps of the ghats of the rivers, gathered men and women who barely knew the art of reading, but were infinitely better educated in the lore of the country's legends and history: they did not suffer from that feeling of inferiority which characterised Calcutta's 'cultivated people'—the feeling that made them admire with passionate fanaticism the regimes of distant countries like Russia or China or America. The better-off section of Calcutta's inhabitants thought it superstitious or undignified to take any interest in Indian myths and cults: for them civilization was equivalent to the general standard of material comfort and of mechanization of industries.

Like Kolez Huzoor, Gama, Balaban, and others, I detested their attitude....there was one thing common to all of us, namely, our belief that those who were indifferent to India's past were incapable of appreciating India's civilization...

To listen, let me repeat, to the discussions of those who regularly met in the temple-yards or on the stone stair-cases of the sacred pools and rivers was a sheer joy: they gave me courage, they deepened my faith, they sustained me in my days of trial.

My musing made me miss a good bit of the erstwhile snorer's exposition.

"To understand one's own limitations, "he was propounding;"is the same as to acquire the knowledge of one's own failings. And what's the advantage of this

knowledge or understanding, whatever you will? It's the surest starting-point for an eventual liberation: man becomes free as and when he becomes conscious of the strength and complications of his bards."

...others were showing signs of impatience: as though they wanted me to bring the discussion on understanding to an end...

In a flash it occurred to me that there was something in the Books of Esoteric Doctrines that was admirably suited to my purpose:

"To understand the "nature" of a thing is to enjoy union with the thing. To understand Krishna...one must seek union with Krishna." (pp.165-7)

As in The Vermilion Boat, the quest for 'liberation' leads the narrator to woman, the dancer Myna in whose company, at the end of The Flame of the Forest, he sets out as a fellow pilgrim 'to seek the world' (p.288). Clearly the underlying conception of Ghose's third and fourth novels was shaped by the story of Krishna and Radha. The quartet is a kind of Indian Divine Comedy in which the legend of the two perfect Indian lovers is re-told in a modern setting. In this sense Sudhin Ghose is in the classical tradition. He is also a romantic, however, especially in the manner in which he projects his personality into the mind and imagination of his protagonist. The extent to which Ghose's character as a writer and an eccentric individual flavours his writing has been accurately assessed by David McCutchion who comments:

His writing is fantastic and whimsical rather than sophisticated, and marred by sentimentality. As doc-

umentation of Indian life his stories are most unreliable, for his mind could not keep a clear hold on reality, and all is distorted, overwrought by his runaway imagination....His mind was lyrical rather than factual....His mind delighted in the outrageous and anecdotic. His personality, abruptly swinging between endearment and scorn, is difficult to pinpoint, but I shall always remember him for his warmth and spontaneity of emotion—a fundamentally generous but temperamental heart.[7]

The combination of eccentricity and tradition in Sudhin Ghose's work indicates that his place in Indian fiction in English is much closer to R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and G.V. Desani than to the social realist and polemical novelists. Ghose also serves as a reminder that two of the main conclusions which can be drawn about the Indian novel in English is that, firstly, it has developed in two main directions—the novel of contemporary social and political life, and the character novel in which the individual is presented in relation to the Indian cultural tradition—and, secondly, that the best novelists (R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao) have pioneered this latter direction in Indian fiction.

The best and most sophisticated novels prove that the most powerful and relevant themes in Indian fiction in English are framed in the light of traditional understanding. The theme of the Indian victim of circum-

7 "Sudhin Ghose", Writers Workshop Miscellany, 18 April 1966, p.66.

stances which roused Mulk Raj Anand's social passion required the larger perspective of R.K. Narayan who, in his tragi-comic comprehensiveness, draws attention to the fact that sociological determinism alone cannot fully explain the Indian character, which is also the product of ancient and complex communal influences as well as the native perversities of individual personality. Balachandra Rajan in The Dark Dancer and Raja Rao in Kanthapura show how for the sensitive Indian involvement in social and national causes inevitably spirals out into metaphysical and transcendental issues. Perhaps the most profound themes in Indian fiction in English, all of which are subtly examined and artistically presented in the novels of R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, are the modern Indian's search for identity, the affirmation of the Hindu belief in the divinity of man, the psychological and moral vitality of the Hindu cultural compulsion to progress from asrama to asrama in the hope of achieving true non-attachment, the complicated interrelationship between illusion and reality, and the East-West encounter.

M.E. Derrett's point that 'In the Indian novel in English we are for the first time in direct communication with an ancient civilization within the unlimited freedom offered by prose fiction'[8] draws attention to

8 The Modern Indian Novel in English, p.146.

the fact that the Indian novelist has the unique and stimulating opportunity to present a homogeneous traditional vision of life in a popular modern literary form that permits a comprehensive and realistic imitation of life. For this reason Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope may come to be regarded as one of the most important novels of the mid-twentieth century.

Although a historical analysis of Indian fiction in English from 1930 to the present shows that much mediocre, mundane work and uninspired writing has been published, on the whole the development of the novel during this period has been the result of enthusiastic activity and a remarkable spirit of literary adventure. Moreover, the best work that has been produced is worthy of serious critical attention. In the genre of the comic novel, R.K. Narayan is one of the most important novelists writing to-day. Narayan's comedy is in the universal tradition and is not likely to suffer the fate of ephemerality which is awaiting much clever but vogue writing in the neurotic-picaro vein which is currently popular. This writing is characterised by the idea that the aim of art is to put art on display; Narayan's is a maturer art that conceals art.

That novelists of the calibre of R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao have appeared in such a short period of literary development is an encouraging sign so far as the future of the Indian novel in English is concerned. In re-

affirming the fundamental Hindu views about God, nature and man, Narayan and Raja Rao are fostering what Sri Aurobindo referred to as 'a renaissance governed by the principle of spirituality'.[9] In The Renaissance in India (1920) Sri Aurobindo predicted the evolution of a modern renaissance based on a fusion of Indian spirituality and western science, a renaissance in which the art and literature of east and west would develop in a spiritually significant direction:

> ...if we give...to religion the sense of the following of the spiritual impulse in its fullness and define spirituality as the attempt to know and live in the highest self, the divine, the all-embracing unity and to raise life in all its parts to the divinest possible values, then it is evident that there was not too much of religion, but rather too little of it—and in what there was, a too one-sided and therefore insufficiently ample tendency. The right remedy is not to belittle still farther the agelong ideal of India, but to return to its old amplitude and give it a still wider scope, to make in very truth all the life of the nation a religion in this high spiritual sense. This is the direction in which the philosophy, poetry, art of the West is, still more or less obscurely, but with an increasing light, beginning to turn... (pp.75-6)

An important sign of such a development in English literature is T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets which was inspired to a significant degree by 'the ageold ideal of India'.

9 The Renaissance in India, Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1951, p.62.

Of similar significance in Indian fiction in English is Narayan's talent for the spiritual impulse in human perspective and Raja Rao's talent for revealing this impulse poetically and mystically both in terms of realistic literary characterisation and of the Indian metaphysical tradition. Yet both novelists authentically remain within the tradition of English literature.

Thus, finally, when one looks at the startling growth of Indian writing in English from 1930 to the present, when one considers that the western novel form has been Indianised and English literature has been enlarged by the introduction into it of an Indian sensibility, it becomes clear that an authentic cultural exchange has occurred. It is time to say of the Indian novel in English that the twain have met.

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